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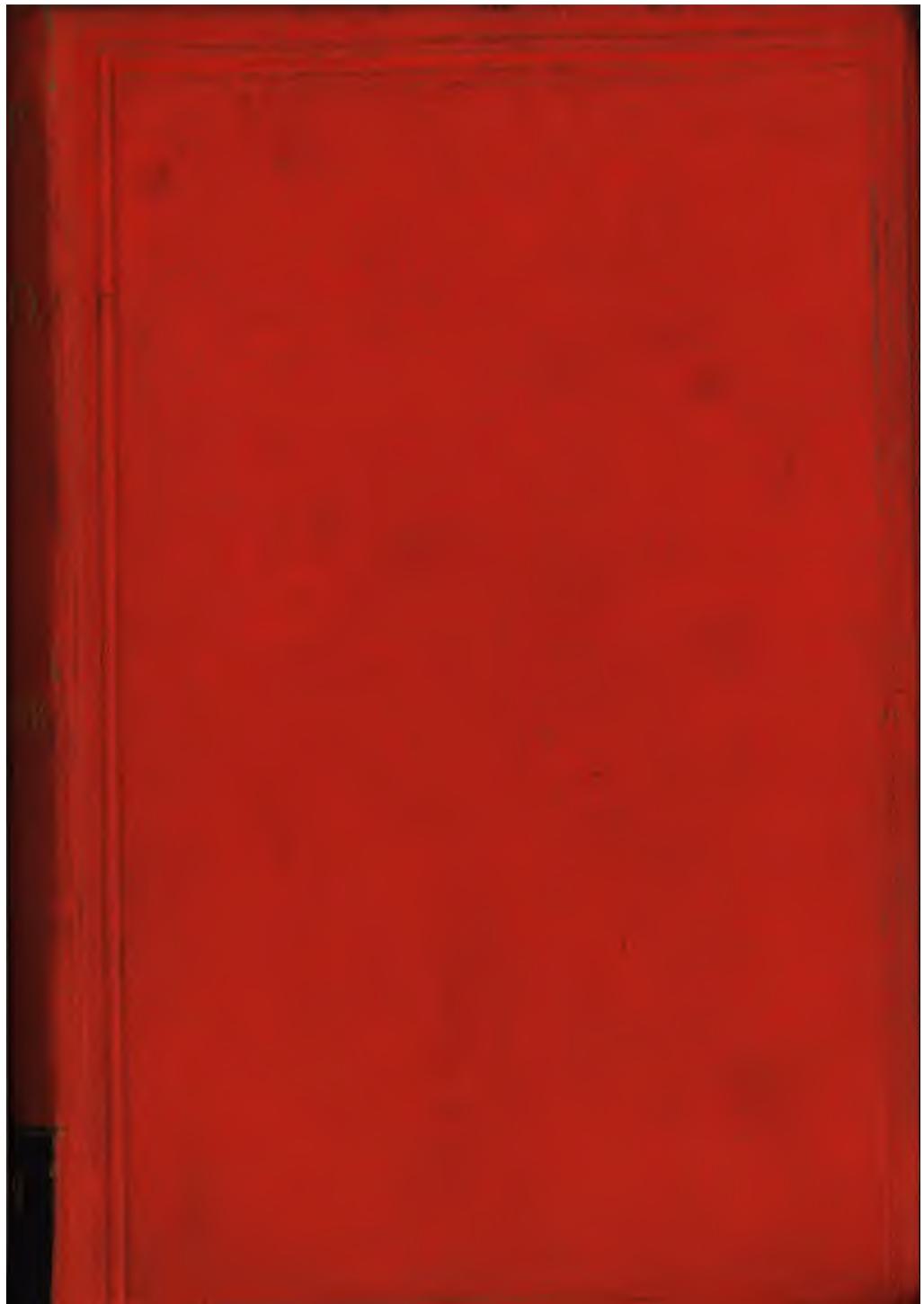
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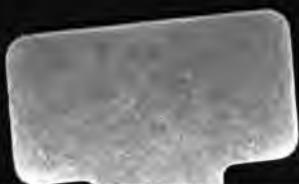


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LOST FOR GOLD.

BY

KATHARINE KING,

AUTHOR OF

“THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.”

“There is thy gold—worse poison to men's minds,
Doing more murders in this loathsome world
Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell.
I sell thee poison—thou hast sold me none.”

Romeo and Juliet.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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LOST FOR GOLD.

CHAPTER I.

AS the young men drove home together that evening, their conversation naturally turned on the entertainers they had just left.

“Why, Mount,” said Slingsby, “you never told us the young lady was a beauty, and yet you are not a person who could be suspected of being ignorant of the fact. Seems, indeed, as if you had forgotten it purposely. Hearing she was an heiress, I of course imagined she must be plain rather than otherwise, and was agreeably disappointed. She’s very pretty, don’t you think so, Morton?”

“Who?—Miss Courtenay? Oh! yes, beautiful,” answered Morton, with a start, as though he had been awakened out of a nap. “I wonder, Mounteagle, as you know them so

well, you never cared for her; but you don't seem very friendly with her, which surprises me."

"Don't he, though!" muttered Slingsby, in an inaudible aside. He had been watching during the evening, and had noticed some by-play that Morton, being an actor in the performance, had not observed.

"She's pretty, but not my style," drawled Mounteagle, quite unconscious that his conduct throughout the evening had been read and understood by one of the men sitting near him, who laughed now when he heard his friend shirk committing himself, though he did not, in the least, understand his object in doing so.

"Why, what do you see to find fault with in her style?" asked Morton, snappishly, and ready to quarrel with anyone who did not admire Miss Courtenay as much as he did.

"Oh! nothing—nothing at all, my good fellow," replied Mounteagle. "I declare, Slingsby, he's smitten; we shall have to take care very soon how we dare to speak of his beauty."

"Nonsense!" said Morton, waking up to a sense of the fact that he was making himself

ridiculous ; " I only wanted to know what objections you had to make against her, as a matter of curiosity, to see how tastes differ ; for, to my mind, she is as nearly perfect as it is possible for woman to be. What are you two fellows laughing at ? Can't a man admire a pretty girl without your seeing anything so very absurd in it ? "

" You'll excuse us, I'm sure," gasped Mount-eagle, between his fits of laughter ; " but it is so very ludicrous to see a cool, calm, collected fellow like you, Morton, lose his head all of a heap to such a girl as that ; a coquette to the ends of her fingers, you must admit, however you may defend her beauty."

" I don't admit it at all," said Morton, sullenly ; " she seemed lively and agreeable, nothing more ; but young fools like you and Slingsby think a girl can't speak a pleasant word to you without flirting, so you give her a name which sticks to her through life, and to which, perhaps, she never had the remotest title. I like Miss Courtenay's manners—they are pleasant, easy, and lady-like ; and I have a most particular dislike to anything flirting or coquetish, it is almost always an affectation, and

all affectation is intensely disagreeable to me."

"Oh! she's not affected, I grant you that," answered Mounteagle; "she's too good an actress not to know that to seem natural is the best acting, and that's what she does; but, for all that, it's only a mask, a little better worn than that of other people."

"What's he up to?" mused Slingsby. "To hear him, one would think he saw all her faults as clearly as I do, and yet I am almost sure he cares for her, from what I saw to-day. Perhaps she refused him some time, and he doesn't want our fellows to get hold of anything they could chaff him about. That's it, you may depend! How mad he would be if he had an idea I had discovered his secret!"

In which conjecture Slingsby was right; perhaps the last thing Mounteagle would have liked, or would have believed possible, would be that his merry little comrade beside him should suspect anything. For Slingsby, as a rule, was master of the art of chaffing, and never spared friend or foe, when he saw the matter to be ridiculed did not go deep; but he was thoroughly good-natured, and never let his desire for fun lead him into wounding

another's feelings. Therefore, having, as he thought, discovered that there might be some sore spot about Mounteagle's admiration for the heiress, he restrained the desire he felt to show his companion he had penetrated his reserve, and found out what lay concealed beneath, and turning to the horse, relieved his pent-up feelings by a succession of short sharp whistles, which were supposed to have an exhilarating effect on the spirits of the quadruped.

"Come, Slingsby," said Mounteagle, suddenly interrupting this amusement, "you haven't told us your opinion yet—is she a flirt, or is she not?"

Slingsby paused to consider; he had a very decided idea that she was, but he was quite aware, from what he had observed, that his saying so would irritate Morton, for which he did not see the least necessity; before he could make up his mind what answer to give, Morton repeated the question.

"It is hardly fair to ask me," replied Slingsby, thus urged. "I admire her very much, she is almost more beautiful than anyone I have ever seen, but I don't like her; couldn't tell

you why ; I can't explain the reason, but still there is the feeling ; I don't like her—I mistrust her. A prejudice you will say, and so it is, therefore I don't think I would be a fair judge in the question at issue between you two."

"Not like her!" they echoed, both at once ; "well, that is very extraordinary. Did you admire Miss Featherhead more than her?"

"In point of beauty, decidedly not," answered the young man ; "but I like her face very much, and, to my mind, she is the pleasantest of the two in conversation. I have a feeling in addressing Miss Courtenay, as if I was expected to admire her, that she takes it as a matter of course that I do, and that if anyone was to tell her I didn't, she wouldn't believe it. She makes herself so sure of pleasing by the mere fact of her being there and deigning to address you, or let you look at her, that I am sure she would never exert herself in the smallest way, beyond what was agreeable to herself, to give you pleasure ; and yet she would like you to think, and tries to persuade you, that there is no limit to the exertions she would make for your gratification."

"After all that long speech, you haven't

answered our question," remarked Morton ; "but, as you are evidently prejudiced, I daresay you are right not to give an opinion. Who was the old lady Miss Courtenay called aunt ?—is she really any relation ? She seems a cross old cat ?"

Mounteagle laughed.

"What ! did you see any sparring between the two ? It is sometimes great fun. Miss Ethel keeps so cool she speedily becomes mistress of the situation ; but the old lady rants and rages, till you wonder where it will all end, and what you will be expected to do in case she gets a fit. She was very near having one, one day when I was in the house, and a most disagreeable scene it was ; but, as soon as the hysterical symptoms began to show themselves, her niece, with great presence of mind, seized a large inkstand that stood near, and said : 'Now, aunt, look here, there's no water in the room, but I don't see why ink shouldn't do as well, so, the minute you go off into one of your usual fits, I'll just pour this over you ! I don't think it will improve your dress, either,' she added, carelessly ; 'but that's nothing, of course, compared with the necessity of reviving

you.' The effect of this speech was wonderful ; old Miss Courtenay gathered herself up off her chair with surprising activity, and walked out of the room without trusting herself to speak, her niece following her to the door, and calling out after her : 'Don't get taken worse on the stairs, or I shall have to come and help you there.' Then shutting the door behind her aunt, she turned to me with a smile that seemed to say—' Didn't I manage that beautifully ? '

"A disagreeable scene, indeed, for you to witness," replied Morton. "I pity the girl having to live with such an old hag as that. So she's Mr. Courtenay's sister, as you call her Miss Courtenay ; well, I don't see much likeness between them—he's a very well-mannered, agreeable man." Which he was certainly, as long as one avoided offending him, but once provoke his resentment, and he never forgave the delinquent; this Morton did not know, having as yet heard none of the Merriton gossip.

Two, at least, of that party had rather unhappy thoughts to accompany them to rest that night. Morton was disturbed and uneasy, because he could by no means account for, or overrule, this feeling that had sprung up in

him. He was so accustomed to be complete master of every emotion or passion that took possession of him, that any sentiment that threatened, as this did, to be beyond his control, was to him a subject for distrust and annoyance. He had heard of love at first sight, and had laughed at it, as he, indeed, was inclined to laugh at any variety of the tender passion that took at all a remarkable form. Was it possible that he was now about to learn that “there were more things in heaven and earth than had been dreamt of in his philosophy”? He feared it was so, and could by no means reconcile his mind to the idea. Should he lose the calm, patient self-reliance that had hitherto been one of his prevailing characteristics? Should he be dependent on a girl’s caprice or whim, and failing her fancy fixing on him, as indeed he owned to himself was improbable, should he become a prey to the overwhelming misery, the utter despair, to which he had seen so many reduced by a similar cause? He told himself he would not—that he was made of sterner stuff than that; and yet he feared greatly, and was dissatisfied and uneasy as he thought the matter over alone.

Even supposing all went well, and she cared for him, as he fondly imagined a woman might care, as he had in his boyish dreams fancied he would wish to be loved, even then the business would be no better—rather worse; the unhappiness of two instead of one, that would be all the difference, for he could not but recognise the improbability of Mr. Courtenay's allowing his only child and heiress to marry so poor a man as he. Yes, he was a fool, he told himself—foolish to feel thus, still more foolish to brood over it, fostering the evil that, if he was wise, he would eradicate from his heart before it had taken strong hold there, and had undermined every thought and feeling, every motive and action, of his life. It was very right, no doubt, to think thus, and to try, by forcing his mind on to some other subject, to drive the one great idea away; but the more determined he was to do so, the more he struggled to carry out his intention, the more the tormenting thoughts would return, driving sleep from his eyelids and rest from his troubled brain, until exhaustion came to his aid, and worn out both in mind and body, slumber brought oblivion at last.

Mounteagle, in the meanwhile, was not much

better off—not so well, indeed, for his old wound had re-opened. He knew also the nature with which he had to deal, and could not dare to indulge in those dreams of success to which Morton's ignorance permitted him to give way. That he was quite determined he would have her for his wife was one thing—that he would win love from her was another. He was under no delusion with regard to her character, and doubted whether she would ever have any love to give; but she was pleasing to him, and he told himself it was desirable he should gain her, if he was to make any good out of this game of life, in which he persuaded himself he was an unwilling performer. As to that fellow Morton, he had gone in for her overhead and ears, that was evident, confound him!—and he didn't trust Slingsby much, for all he professed to have escaped so very heart-whole that evening. Perhaps it was because Slingsby felt his danger, and was aware how little chance he had among so many competitors, that he had wisely retired at once from the conflict, and tried to persuade himself Miss Featherhead was much the most charming of the two; a decided case of sour grapes, Mounteagle mused; indeed, his

own position seemed quite as hopeless as Slingsby's, only that he wouldn't give up, if he could get Morton out of the way. He was the only rival that could be considered dangerous, that Mounteagle had yet seen in the society about Merriton, as far as it had been represented that evening at the Park; and even supposing they were a better lot than they appeared to be, he did not think Ethel Courtenay was a girl at all likely to be captivated by a county squire, and the position and duties marriage with one would entail. But Morton, the man whom he had liked, the man who had been as a brother to him, the man whose very presence once was welcome to him, now was irritating and distasteful. How was he to get rid of him; or, failing that, how was he to undermine the influence his Captain so frequently possessed over those with whom he associated?

This problem perplexed him, kept him wakeful and anxious, but no solution presented itself; sleep overtook him while his mind was still busy with the subject, and his dreams were troubled.

When he awoke he was strangely confused, and, thinking still of Morton, muttered: "Con-

found the fellow! I wish he was back at Aldershot with Clara Singleton, or anyone else who would have him;" not hesitating, in his rage, to speak thus slightly of the girl he had deceived. Then, as a remembrance of her goodness and beauty rose with the mention of her name before him, he felt a little ashamed of himself, and muttered: "I believe it would be a great deal better for me if I cared for her instead of the other one, but there's no good wishing that now." Thus the night passed to these two men—one conscious that in the other he had a rival who might be dangerous, and whom it behoved him, in the success of his plan, to supplant in some way; the other, quite ignorant that any similarity of feeling existed between him and his friend on the subject of their young hostess, and quite capable, had he been aware that such was the fact, of withdrawing his claims to her attention, and allowing his rival free scope to prosecute his suit.

Captain Morton was just the kind of man likely to act in a foolish Quixotic manner in such a position, had he been aware how matters lay; but he was not so aware, and arose next morning with all his doubts and fears silenced,

and his hopes springing up afresh, under the influence of the bright sunshine and crisp, frosty morning air. When they met at breakfast, Morton noticed that Mounteagle was sullen and ill-tempered in his manner towards himself, which was unusual ; for as a rule, however badly Mounteagle behaved to his other superiors, he was friendly with his Captain. To-day it was quite different, several times he was pointedly rude to Morton, and, to make it evident that he was so purposely, he was particularly and unusually merry and pleasant with all the rest.

“ What’s up now ? ” thought the Captain, puzzled by this new phase in his subaltern’s character ; “ I thought I had got to the bottom of all the objectionable points in that fellow’s nature, but it seems there are a few more to come that I know nothing of as yet. Courage, however ; if he gets on well with the rest, I think I can manage to bear with him, unless he becomes very bad indeed.”

And very bad indeed he evidently did intend to become, for looking up presently, he said :

“ I say, Attwood, did you hear how Morton went in for the heiress last night ? It’s a

curious feature in such a very disinterested man, that he should be so desperately and suddenly smitten by a girl who will have £10,000 a year; especially when he has always been considered rather hard-hearted hitherto."

Morton started as if he had been stung, and all his self-command could not prevent a dark flush covering his face, even showing under his deeply-bronzed skin, while a strange look came into his eyes, and the veins in his forehead swelled; he forced himself to control the paroxysm of rage that rose within him.

Attwood, a quiet, gentlemanly young man, looked from one to the other apprehensively; during all the time he had been in the regiment, he had never seen such a look in Morton's face, and though he had seen many a bad expression in Mounteagle's before, it had never borne quite so evil a character as now. What could be up between the two, and how would it end? Morton intended to speak, from the way he looked at Mounteagle, but as yet he evidently feared to trust himself to do so. It was a base and mean insinuation the one just made, Attwood knew; he, as well as all the rest of the regiment, was well acquainted with Morton's gener-

ous and noble mind. If it were true he had paid the heiress attention, then it must be because he admired her, and not from any other motive; but, in a vague, far-off kind of way, the young man realised what the sting of such an accusation must be to a man like his Captain. Yet he did not comprehend the full bitterness of the words, nor understand the cause that made them wound so deeply. It was not the baseness of which he was accused, and which he, of all men, could well afford to scorn, that galled him to the quick; it was the source from whence it proceeded that caused it to rankle and fester in his mind. The man to whom he had been more than a brother, from whom he had borne insult and annoyance, whom he had shielded from punishment richly-deserved, this man it was who had dealt him so cowardly a blow.

He spoke at last very quietly, with his indignant troubled eyes fixed full on Mounteagle's face :

“ You of all men,” he said, “ should have known me better than to speak as you have spoken of me just now. Henceforth there can be no friendship between us.” As he concluded, he rose and left the room, calm and stern, with-

out addressing another look or word to the offender, who, in spite of his jealousy, felt an uneasy conviction that in losing such a friend he had made a false step, the inconvenience of which he would feel at some future time.

As soon as Morton was well out of the room, there was a buzz of voices all round the table.

"You've lost a friend," said Slingsby, "and, let me tell you, you deserve it. A man more thoroughly above mercenary motives never lived than Morton, and even had he not been so kind to you when you got into difficulties, gentlemanly feeling should have kept you from giving utterance to such a sneer."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," chimed in Royston; "we all know well enough Captain Morton is above reproach in the light in which you spoke of him, and you must have been aware your inference was neither true nor just."

"I should advise you to take care what you say, young man," answered Mounteagle, looking coldly at Royston. "What I said was true, that Morton paid great attention to the heiress; and the conclusion I drew therefrom was such as would have presented itself to anyone who was

acquainted with his usual sentiments on the subject of love, and matters of that kind, and was not accustomed to take a man at his own valuation, or at that of his friends ; it was the opinion of one who had never seen him under temptation, and chose to judge for himself what might be the cause of so sudden an alteration in sentiments and character."

Everyone looked coldly at the young man, as he finished speaking ; it was very evident he was not in a mood to bear remonstrance on the subject of his late ebullition of temper, and the matter was let drop ; but he felt that all avoided conversation with him, and he knew instinctively that he had never fallen so low in the opinion of his companions before. Punch's cynical but laughable definition of gratitude, "as a lively anticipation of favours to come," was exemplified pretty plainly before their eyes, in the person of Mounteagle, who had been, to all appearance, grateful for Morton's kindness, and anxious to please him, as long as he felt the want of a friend ; but now that he had gained a more powerful protector in the Colonel, all remembrance of his Captain's long-continued and unwearied kindness faded from his memory, and he repaid mercy with in-

solence, consideration with scorn ; and the contemplation of a quality they had thought of with a laugh when it was imaginary, was not pleasant when it came before them as a reality.

Up in his own room, Captain Morton gave way to the tumult of outraged and indignant feelings that rose within him. Up and down the narrow space he paced, his agitation being too great to admit of his remaining quiet for an instant, whilst a multitude of confused passionate thoughts crowded into his mind, trying to take shape and form as they rushed and tumbled over each other in the hurry and tumult of his excitement.

That man, was the ever-recurring idea that would come uppermost, that he should turn thus on him—it was too bad ; and the motive that had been attributed to him, was it possible that everyone would regard his admiration for Miss Courtenay in that light ? or was the idea only the offspring of Mounteagle's jaundiced mind ? Surely, she was beautiful enough to account for any man's infatuation, had she not a penny in the world ; and he, though not rich, possessed a competence that had always preserved him from feeling a desire for money, and

ought, therefore, to preserve him from the imputation of such a desire. And this design of which he was accused, he had always been accustomed to regard as the meanest form in which the love of money could show itself, either in man or woman. In a woman, if anything, it would be worse than in a man, for she would barter her liberty of mind and body utterly and entirely for a greed of gain, the gratification of which must depend absolutely on the will of the master to whom she had sold herself; whereas, with a man, there was a difference in fact, though not in spirit. He would equally have exchanged his freedom for the gold brought him by any woman whom he married for her money, if he fulfilled the vows made by him before God on the marriage-day; but then, whereas in her case escape from the fulfilment of those vows is difficult and dangerous, in his it is as easy as though he were in no way bound; and if he has gained the riches for which he made the bargain, the world he serves will pardon his sin against the woman who bought him, for the sake of the gold which she paid as his price.

These reflections did not come into Morton's

mind now for the first time ; they had often passed through it before, when the subject had been brought before him, either in reading or conversation, but now they seemed to assume larger proportions, to become of more consequence in his eyes than formerly. Then it had been an abstract matter, now it was a personal one, and it behoved him to consider seriously whether he should crush this embryo passion out of his heart and life at once, if it were possible to do so, for fear of what the malignant tongue of the gossiping world might say ; or whether he should pursue it, with the determination to throw every power of body and mind into the effort to gain the love, which, he felt now, would be the one real object of his life. It would be cowardly, he told himself, to turn back from fear of slandering tongues, and yet the slander had power to wound him so deeply, he could not tell whether the love would be worth it. Though he felt an instinctive perception of the depth and force it might attain, as yet he had no experience of such feelings, and could he avoid this girl, and crush the sentiments she had succeeded in awakening in him, he might live the rest of his life in peaceful,

undisturbed apathy, ignorant alike of the heights of rapture to which the human soul can attain, or the abyss of misery into which it may be plunged. And so live but half a life—for that was the summing-up of the plan he proposed to himself—know but half of the powers of his nature, exercise but half the capabilities that God had given him, taste but half the joys with which this mortal life has been blessed. True, he would lose all this, though he had never so thought before, when congratulating himself on exemption from the weaknesses of those around him. It was much to lose—half his existence, surely; but then there was one consideration to be put into the other side of the scale, a consideration that weighed down all the others, and made him again doubtful whether the course he had chosen was not the wisest, as he thought of all love meant, or might be made to mean, in the picture, otherwise so fair, that he had drawn for himself but now. And that consideration was the power of suffering inherent in him, as in every human soul, since our first parents were driven from the Garden of Eden into a world that brought forth thorns and thistles, and which, in the careless apathetic life he led,

was dulled and blunted. He felt intuitively he had seen it through life around him, that this, the most powerful, the most omnipresent of mortal capabilities, was everywhere to be met—in the gay worldly assembly, in the privacy of the domestic circle. For one throb of rapture the pangs of suffering are innumerable; for one glimpse of happiness there are hours of misery; for one soul that can say “Eat, drink, and be merry, thou hast goods laid up for many years,” there are thousands to whom the joys and advantages of this world are but a mockery—who have but tasted once from the golden bowl of life the elixir of happiness, when it has been snatched from their lips, never to slake the fevered palate again with the gladdening and heavenly draught.

Yes, if he lost he gained, that was evident; yet his heart told him he would be acting the part of a coward if he shirked his responsibilities in life, its pleasures and its pains, if he shunned the happiness that might be before him, because it was accompanied by the suffering that is inherent to all the joys allotted to human nature.

That decided him; he had never turned from

trouble when it lay in the path of duty—should he let it turn him now from the pursuit of happiness? Thus musing, he stopped in his troubled walk. “What a fool I am!” he thought; “by keeping myself away from joy, I thought I should avoid sorrow, now I see suffering will find its way everywhere; no matter how carefully you guard yourself against the one, you cannot guard against the other. That wretched lad downstairs has occasioned me not a little pain this morning, and I don’t know that he ever gave me an hour’s pleasure, so I may as well give up the attempt to fashion a world for myself after my own fancies. Let me try to live honourably and truly towards him, as towards the others; not letting his ingratitude warp my mind, and make me unjust to him—not letting fear of him cause me to yield my rights as a man, to choose my own course, irrespective of his words or opinions.” Thus thinking, Morton went down to the ante-room, took up the morning paper and began reading, as though nothing had happened; the only perceptible change in him being that, whereas he usually spoke to Mounteagle whenever he

was present, he now took no notice of him, though he was sitting not far off.

Mounteagle looked up when Morton entered the room. Better feelings had prevailed ; he remembered all his Captain's long-suffering kindness, and had Morton spoken to him then, he would no doubt have come forward and asked pardon for his cruel and unjust speech. But Morton's face was blandly unconscious of his presence ; there was a calm overlooking of Mounteagle's existence in the glance which he threw around on entering ; and the young man noticing it, winced under the contempt it expressed, and buried himself more deeply in his newspaper.

That day was not a pleasant one to the subaltern—probably he suffered more in the long run from his bitter words than his Captain ; everyone's sympathies were so obviously with Morton, that alone must have aggravated Mounteagle ; besides this, there was a kind of general avoidance of him, as though each feared he might be the victim of a similar attack on another occasion.

“ Makes one feel as if one was a mad dog,

and likely to bite at any minute," he thought, late that evening, when he went to his room. "Even that little scamp, Slingsby, who used to be so thick with me, would only answer in monosyllables when I addressed him, and seemed glad to get away from me that time I met him out. If it wasn't for that girl, I'd hang myself, or cut my throat, or do something. Here have I been at cross-purposes with the world my whole life; and it's not so very much my own fault either—which of them with my history at their back would be much better? I'm sorry about Morton, he was the best of the lot; but, if he thinks he's going to get that girl from me, he's much mistaken—I'll kill him first!" His last waking thought was that he would call at the Park next day.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT morning, when Mounteagle came down, he heard all the rest of his comrades talking of a basket of game that had just arrived, sent as a present to the mess by Mr. Courtenay; and he found, to his great disgust and disappointment, that he would not be the only one calling at the Park that day, as the others had determined on doing so. For a few minutes he could not make up his mind whether he should join them, and, assisted by the presence of a number, keep to his resolution of neglecting the heiress, and thereby provoking her to try to win him back; or whether he should wait till next day, and, going alone, make his avoidance of her more marked by devoting himself to her father or her aunt.

After a little consideration, the latter course

seemed to him the best for many reasons, and principally because he was well aware he would be unable to restrain some outbreak of jealousy, should, as would most probably be the case, Morton attach himself to Ethel, and should she, on her part, seem pleased, and offer him encouragement. Under such circumstances, he knew full well he could not trust himself; he would be certain to betray his secret, insult Morton, annoy Ethel, and show how very skin-deep his assumed indifference the other evening had been. Also, if he went alone next day, he should be at liberty to pursue whatever course should at the time seem good to him; and thus thinking, he announced his intention of not accompanying the rest of the party to the Park.

“I will stay at home and take charge of the Barracks—besides, I have seen nothing of the town as yet; and though there cannot be much to see, still I may unearth something amusing, if I hunt for it very diligently during my solitary ramble this afternoon.”

This he said to Attwood, with a studied ease of manner that was too well done to be quite natural, and his comfort was not increased by

observing that almost every face round the table expressed satisfaction on hearing the intelligence. "This won't do," he thought; "these fellows used to like me so much, I was a sort of king among them; now I am an outcast, a pariah—what can be the reason? I must have been assuming the king too much, caring too little what they thought and said; now I'll have to begin all over again, and toil up the weary road to popularity anew. Never mind, it's hard to begin a second time, but what I've done once I can do again, and before long they will all tell a different story from what they do now." Full of this idea, he roused himself from the dull indifferent state into which he had fallen the last few days, bore rebuffs and short answers with admirable patience, chatted, laughed, offered to lend this one a gun, that one a horse, and so on, till, before the morning was over, the universal expression was, "What a pity that fellow Mounteagle has such an abominable temper! He's a real good sort, when he's not put out—which, unfortunately, is very seldom." The only one on whom he did not try his arts was Morton; he had an instinctive feeling that Morton would detect

the purpose hidden underneath this sudden change of manner; and even had that not been likely, he could not bring himself to be civil to the man who, he was firmly persuaded, only wanted a little more opportunity to become Ethel Courtenay's lover.

On the return of the others from the Park, he was anxious to hear what had been said and done—who had talked together and who had not, whether anyone had inquired for him, and so forth. Attwood was a young man who could easily be pumped, and on him Mounteagle fastened the minute they returned.

“I say, Attwood,” he said, coming lazily into the ante-room, where they were all standing talking, “when you've done here, just come out with me to the stable; I want to ask your opinion about that colt I bought the other day.”

“Oh! certainly. I'm not busy, I can come now,” replied Attwood, who just knew a horse from a cow, and was therefore immensely pleased at being consulted on the subject.

“Well, how did you get on?—who was there, and what do you think of the family?” asked Mounteagle, as soon as they were outside.

“It was very jolly,” Attwood answered.

“ We played croquet, and they wanted us to stop to dinner, but Morton seemed to think we'd better not—there were some people coming, and we weren't properly got up. However, if we like, we are to change now and go out again ; I don't think I shall go, for though I like them very much, yet Morton makes such tremendous running with Miss Ethel Courtenay that nobody else gets a chance of speaking to her, and I don't see the fun of watching him make love, when you'd much rather be doing it yourself.”

Mounteagle gnashed his teeth with rage at this description of what he had before told himself he was quite prepared to hear ; but after a pause he continued :

“ Then you admire the heiress ? As for Morton, as I before said, I don't know that it is all admiration.”

“ Admire her ! Oh, yes ! who wouldn't do so ? She is most lovely, and seems as amiable as she is beautiful.” [Here Mounteagle whistled softly to himself, and regarded his companion with a curious expression of countenance.] “ But, really, I think you are wrong with regard to Morton ; I don't believe, when he's near her,

he remembers she has a penny in the world—I'm sure I don't."

"Yes, but your character is different from that of Morton; he is a man who has always made it his boast he doesn't believe in love as a strong motive principle in a man's life—nothing more than a mere passing fancy is ever experienced or acknowledged by him, and therefore you must allow it is extraordinary when he suddenly goes in for a very severe case of love at first sight with the richest woman it has ever been his fortune to meet. It looks suspicious, and I for one suspect it."

"It is strange, certainly," replied Attwood, "and were she less beautiful, I should be inclined to think you were right; but really one cannot wonder at any man's being suddenly smitten in that quarter."

"Then do you imagine that, in all his wanderings, Morton never met with so beautiful a woman before?—for, if you believe that, I don't. I am sure he has seen many as lovely, though perhaps not more so, but it did not pay to fall in love with them, and our prudent friend didn't do it. Here we are at the stable. Now tell me—don't you think there is a slight

enlargement of the off hock? I am afraid, from the look of it, that when I have worked him a year or two, he will throw out a spavin. Would you advise me to sell him now, before there is anything actually the matter; or to keep him, and take my chance of preserving him, by firing and so on?"

Now Mounteagle didn't care one straw what Attwood's advice was, as he was well aware that young man knew nothing about the business; besides he had made up his mind, the minute he noticed the suspicious appearance of the hock. The horse was a showy one, and would sell well as it then was, if he could catch hold of a purchaser who thought sufficiently well of his own judgment to buy without a veterinary surgeon's opinion, and Mounteagle thought he knew where he could find such a one; but as he had brought Attwood down to the stable, he was obliged to ask him something; of course, he could act as he pleased, no matter what his companion's advice might be.

Attwood, after considerable hesitation and consideration, favoured the idea of selling the animal at once; and having been solemnly sworn over not to divulge the secret that had

been imparted to him, they strolled back to barracks, the young Lieutenant's mind being skilfully worked up against Morton all the way, so that by the time they again entered the square, he had begun to regard his Captain as one of the most mercenary heartless wretches alive. Mounteagle was helped in his work of poisoning Attwood's mind against his superior by the fact that the young man was already experiencing the incipient pangs of jealousy, he having fallen a victim to a few smiling glances from Ethel's golden eyes, a few merry words spoken in her low sweet voice.

Attwood changed his mind, of course, about going, and they all set off again for the Park, shortly after the consultation on the bay colt. Mounteagle remained behind, though Mr. Courtenay had sent him a very kind message by Slingsby, begging that he would return with them. He answered this by a note excusing himself from going, on the plea that he must stay in barracks, unless one of the others stopped; though he knew well that, situated as they were in a quiet country town, Morton would have passed over such a breach of rules, had his permission been asked. But, in the first

place, that was exactly what Mounteagle didn't choose to do ; and, in the second, he had ascertained that Ethel had never once inquired the cause of his absence.

They went, and enjoyed themselves more or less, according to what their wishes and expectations had been on setting out. He remained behind and moped, determining to call on Mr. Courtenay next day, and, if possible, keep himself away from Ethel ; though how he should be able to resist the temptation if she, for lack of other amusement, should desire to be entertained by him, he could not tell. Something in the game which he was now playing, and which appeared as yet to promise badly for him, reminded him of the one in which he and Clara Singleton had lately been engaged. A happy thought struck him—he would write to her ; it would wile away a short part of the long evening. Sitting down, he began the letter, the effect of which on Clara we have already described. Try as he might, thoughts would not come to him, words would not flow freely from his pen ; his mind was too pre-occupied to go back to the old associations, to recall the fleeting emotions of that brief period

when he had thought the love of this woman might adorn his life in happiness, and comfort him in sorrow. Yet he dared not reveal himself before her, as he knew himself to be, a deceiver—he would try and carry on the deception a little longer, matters could not be worse for her than they were now, and if his scheme to win Ethel Courtenay did not succeed, what better portion in life could he hope for than the love of the girl whom he was even now wronging?

He finished his letter at once; fortunately, as he thought, the ambiguity of the relations between them made it easier for him to accomplish his task. Open expressions of affection were not wanted, were not even admissible; vague hints and allusions were quite sufficient to induce the credulous heart addressed to believe that he was still true, and more devoted than ever. The Courtenays he mentioned casually, with the hope that if she heard of them from other quarters, his careless mention of them might deceive her—as it had done.

When the others came in that night, he had another short conference with Attwood, but this time it was the Lieutenant who sought the conversation. Morton, he said, had flirted

shamefully with Miss Courtenay, whenever she would permit him, to the almost total exclusion of everyone else; but, fortunately, she was not quite as blind as he to the duties she owed to society, and every now and then she would escape from him, and pay attention to the other guests in her pretty, graceful way, till Morton would follow her, and again monopolize her. "I don't think she cares much about him," he went on; "though she talks to him a good deal, because she can't help it."

That was satisfactory, at least Mounteagle thought, though he did not quite concur in the inference Attwood drew from it—which was that she would have preferred flirting with himself. Just as he was leaving the room, Attwood put his head in again, and said:

"I was nearly forgetting to tell you that she asked me whether you were ill, as you had not come out to-day."

"And what did you say?"

"I said you were in charge of barracks, but, as I thought you could have got leave if you had asked for it, I supposed you didn't care about going out."

Mounteagle smiled grimly; unconsciously the

young man had carried out his plan excellently.

“What did she say?” he asked.

“She didn’t look quite pleased, I thought, and said you must have found them very dull the night before, to prefer remaining in barracks to coming out. Then she changed the subject. I think she fancied you very rude, for she looked quite put out.”

“Well, good night, old fellow. If the heiress is annoyed with me I can’t help it, and there will be more chance for you others.” As Attwood left, Mounteagle drew his chair nearer to the fire and laughed to himself, thinking that his plan was working well.

“It only needs a little courage now to carry it out and win the day. I wonder shall I have that courage?”

Next morning he rode over to the Park before lunch, but asked only for Mr. Courtenay. He was shown into the library, and there he and his host indulged in a long gossip over old friends and times. When he took leave he left cards for the ladies with the butler, and mounting his horse, rode slowly away. As he went quietly down the avenue, which was shaded by large trees, whose foliage had almost all

fallen, intermixed with magnificent laurels and other evergreens, forming an undergrowth that even in the depth of Winter made the plantations look green and summery, he did not perceive Ethel Courtenay coming towards him on foot. She recognized him as soon as he came in sight, and taking an immediate resolution, walked towards him. She was beside him before he noticed her, and it was her soft voice saying "Good morning," that aroused him from his reverie. She laid her hand on the horse's neck as he reined it in beside her, and continued—

" You are the very person I wished to see, Mr. Mounteagle. I cannot talk to you comfortably up there ; won't you come back to the house ? "

" I have just been there. I called on your father, and left cards for you and Miss Courtenay."

" Then you did not come to see us ? " she asked, quickly. " It was not civil, to say the least, when you dined with us the other night. However, if you won't come home, get down and walk back with me up the avenue. I told you I wished to speak to you."

" With pleasure," he answered politely, but stiffly. " I am completely at your service."

As he spoke he dismounted, and throwing the bridle over his arm, moved on beside her without speaking. She had desired this interview, and he was determined she should do the hard work of it.

As for Ethel herself, now he was walking beside her she did not quite know how to begin what she had to say. She could not believe that he had ceased to care for her, and yet it seemed very like it; he was so polite, and stiff, and formal—it was really provoking. He was by far the best-looking man about, and it would have flattered her vanity to have him running after her, as all those others were; besides she liked talking to him—he always had something different to say from the rest, and he said it in a different manner; she could not explain even to herself in what the difference consisted, but she felt it, and it pleased her. There was no good in their walking on in silence, however, some one must speak, and as he did not seem in the least inclined to begin, she would be obliged to do it.

“What have we done to you, Mr. Mount-eagle?” she asked suddenly. “Have we offended you?”

“Offended me! Oh, no!” And he relapsed into silence.

“Well, but you must be annoyed in some way, when you speak and look like that; and besides, it is evident that you avoid us—avoid me. There was a time when you used not to do so.”

“That time is past long ago,” he replied, calmly and coldly, though his heart beat furiously.

She coloured, and half turned away, but she was piqued. She determined now she would win him back, and that she would make him pay afterwards for all the trouble he had given her.

“Why should it be past?” she asked softly. “Are you tired of talking to me? You used never to be so.”

The soft tone and pleading manner stirred up recollections of that last day when he had pleaded to her, and she had repulsed him with taunts and cruel words. The remembrance awoke a savage devil long lying dormant in his breast, and he turned on her, resolved to wound her pride, if he could not touch her heart.

“One tires of all things, even of the most

beautiful; and what one admires at one time, one ceases to feel attractive when one is a little older. You are alluding to the time when I was mad enough to believe I loved you, and when you were so kind as to cure me of that folly. I have not forgotten the lesson you taught me then, and as I should be unwilling to risk repeating it, I have the honour to wish you good morning."

So saying, he sprang on his horse, lifted his hat, and turned to leave, without having touched her hand, or shown one symptom that he in any way felt her power over him, unless the bitterness of his last words, and the dark scowl with which he returned her glance, could be evidences of feeling; but if so, it was a feeling the very opposite of that which she wished to excite.

When he turned the corner of the road and vanished from sight, Ethel sat down on the grass, and putting her hands before her face, shed a few tears of real annoyance and mortification. She had never been so slighted in her life before, the sensation was new and unpleasant, and for the first time she wondered whether her arts were losing their power, or whether she

had offended this man so irretrievably that she could never regain her old dominion over him. She could hardly believe that any man who had once been so much her slave as he had been, could ever wholly break from his bondage; her charms were as potent as ever, she knew, when she thought of Captain Morton's devotion, and the very clearly shown admiration of his comrades. The more she smarted under a sense of defeat, the more indignant she felt at the treatment she had received, the more firmly she resolved to regain her old empire; and, when once re-established in power, to have her revenge.

She did not see him again for some time after this, but she had many opportunities of practising her wiles upon Morton, Attwood, and several of the others, who wasted an immensity of time wandering about anywhere where they thought themselves likely to meet her, and who were perpetually calling at the Park on some pretext or other. But Morton's honest love, clearly to be seen in every look and action, was nothing to her, as long as that one man kept aloof, and would have nothing to say to her. She spoke in a careless manner on the subject to Morton

one day, saying, "One of your subalterns, Mr. Mounteagle, seems a very strange man; we knew him some time ago, but then he was much more sociable and much pleasanter than he is now. He shows such marked dislike to ladies' society."

"I think I can explain that," the Captain answered. "Everyone knows I have no reason to like him, for a more wrong-headed fellow never lived, and he is always getting into scrapes; but on one occasion, when I was speaking to him about some row he had got himself into, he told me he had been treated badly by a woman, and the remembrance of that galled him, and set him at odds with the world continually. I told him, whoever she might be, there were other women as good as she in the world, and the best thing he could do would be to forget her, and go in for some one else. He then said that was not in his power to do; that no woman ever again would waken his heart to pain or pleasure—in fact, he considers himself beyond all that now; but this of course is nonsense in a man of his age—he will soon find all is not lost because one woman behaved ill to him, and indeed before we left Aldershot, I thought he was rather struck

by our Colonel's niece ; perhaps if he was so, that would account for his being inclined to mope, now that he is away from her."

Ethel winced a little as she heard this ; the idea that anyone should acquire the power over him that she had lost, was very distasteful to her, but instead of inducing her to give up her plan as hopeless, it only strengthened her in her resolve to have him again at any price.

" You are a wise man, Captain Morton," she replied, concealing her feelings, " to be able to content yourself with the attainable when you cannot get the unattainable ; but few people have their hearts so well under control. It must save you both pain and trouble, if you practise what you advise others."

" I used at that time to think I could do so always," he answered ; " but latterly I am beginning to believe I was a little presumptuous in my ideas. I have found since then there may be feelings that no self-control can repress, no determination banish from the heart. I have been learning more of myself lately than I ever thought to know, and am almost ashamed of myself for having been so ignorant of the wants and capabilities of human nature as I was when

I gave Mounteagle the advice I related to you. I told you I have been learning," he went on, "but I have not told you who has been my teacher. Who should you think it is?"

"Stupid man!" mentally said Ethel; "he will say something foolish if I don't stop him."

"I haven't the least idea," she answered, with a kind of polite indifference, and the nearest approach to a yawn she considered permissible. If he doesn't take the hint, she thought, I'll go over and talk to Mr. Slingsby.

"You are my teacher," he said softly, trying to look into her eyes, and see if there was any answering sign of feeling in them; but she was gazing out of the window in an absent manner, and only replied,

"Ah, indeed! Then I'm afraid you won't get much good from me, as I am a great stupid myself, and never could learn anything but how best to amuse myself. Mr. Slingsby, I wish you would sing that song I heard you all talking about the other day. See, I've opened the piano, and you have no excuse, as I know you play."

Thus she diverted Morton's thoughts, and got over the dangerous moment which would other-

wise infallibly have resulted in his saying something she could not have affected to misunderstand. When the visit was over, and they had gone, she ran to her room, and sitting down by the fire, laughed to herself over what had occurred.

“I shall have trouble with that man,” she thought; “he is so fearfully in earnest, and I have no doubt, if he got hold of my father, would persuade him to consent to anything. I’m sure I don’t know why papa’s so fond of him. I see nothing particular in him, except that he’s so dreadfully gone about me. And all this is no good to me, so long as the only one I want stands off, so that I never get a chance of speaking to him. I’ll get papa to ask him to dinner, and I’ll write the note myself; if that doesn’t succeed, I shan’t know what to do.”

As Morton walked home that afternoon (he had let the others return without him in the trap), his thoughts reverted to the words he had said, which would surely have betrayed his feelings to any keen observer; but she had seemed not to notice them, had taken them quite as a matter of course, and no doubt she was right so to do; for though rashly he had very nearly

spoken out and revealed his feelings, he knew that he had not been long enough acquainted with her to be by any means sure what the result of such a course would be. She might refuse him, simply because she had not known him a sufficient time to be certain of the state of her own heart with regard to him; in that case he felt he should not have courage to approach the subject again, that in all probability he would avoid her as much as he now sought her, and allow another to carry off the prize that, if he had patience to wait, he might win for himself. Certainly it was very hard to feel for her as he did, and see her surrounded day after day by others, who were all rivals, without being able to utter the sentiments that every hour gathered strength within him. Now he began to understand young Mounteagle's blighted life, if the woman under whose influence he had fallen had been some such enchantress as this. Now he could imagine that his prophecy, that some other might one day become as dear, must have sounded like mocking words in the young man's ears; he could feel a little for the moroseness and bitterness of the subaltern's spirit, if he had passed through the fiery ordeal

of such a love scorned and rejected. What would be his life, should such a fate await him, as was very probable; for why should he be the fortunate one among all those striving along with him for this one object?

He shrunk from the thought, and put it away from him—time enough to meet that misery when it came, for the present he would rejoice in the happiness he was able to obtain, and put such gloomy forebodings far from him. The better to strengthen his position, he cultivated Mr. Courtenay with assiduity, determined that, if possible, he would encounter no opposition in that quarter. Not that he deceived himself in the least about one point of Ethel's character; he never for one moment believed she would allow her father's opposition to affect her, if she had once made up her mind to forego all he could give her, and act for herself. He knew enough of her to see that her will was at present her law, and he concluded that if her affections were sufficiently awakened to bring it into subjection to them, all her strength of mind and determination would be exerted in subservience to them, in effecting what they led her to desire.

He might be right, but for one slight mistake in the calculation—she had no such power of affection in her.

Mr. Courtenay was applied to by his daughter on the subject of asking Mounteagle to dinner.

“Do as you like,” he said. “I don’t think myself he’ll care to come; he seems to dislike ladies’ society, and indeed, not to care much for going out anywhere. What can have happened to him? He used to be so different.”

“Yes, he’s very much changed certainly,” replied the girl, thinking of what Captain Morton had told her, but keeping it to herself. “However, for the sake of old times, we may as well try to amuse him a little. I will write and ask him for to-morrow. Shall we have any of the others?”

“You may ask Morton; he’s a nice fellow, and very highly connected. I was asking Bosanquet about him the other day, and he tells me he is the next heir to the Beechtown title. A very nice man indeed, though not rich, which is a pity.”

“I shouldn’t think it matters much to him,” she answered absently, thinking of Mounteagle

had more it would matter a good deal both to him and her.

Mr. Courtenay looked at his daughter sharply. To him her answer conveyed a meaning widely different from the one she gave it, and it seemed the inference he drew from it was not unpleasing, for he smiled, and told her to write her notes, and she could ride into town and post them herself, as their daily messenger had gone in before.

Glad of the permission, she hurried off and wrote the invitations, adding a few lines to Mounteagle's, which certainly were not to be found in the other. It ran as follows:—

“ DEAR MR. MOUNTEAGLE,

“ Will you come out and dine with us to-morrow, at half-past seven o'clock? After what you said to me the other day, I hardly like suggesting that we may still be friends. But it makes me sorry that for the sake of a fault of mine, which, however, you assured me was forgotten, there should be a breach between us. Come at least to-morrow night, and if you then find that bygones cannot be bygones, and that you still bear me ill-will for my rudeness, it will

be easy to consider the matter as settled, and to come here no more.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ ETHEL COURtenay.”

When Mounteagle received this note he was in the ante-room, and thrust it into his pocket without opening it. The handwriting he knew well, what the contents of it might be he did not know, but he guessed they were some overtures of peace, and his heart beat high with gratification at the thought. As soon as he could get away he hurried up to his room, and there read it. He laughed a bitter, hard laugh, as he finished, and muttered,

“ So she is coming down from her high horse at last, is she? I wonder which of us will win this game? I am getting the cards into my own hand now, and we shall see. The only difficulty will be to keep cool; if I fail there, I am done for.”

Full of the determination that nothing should draw him out of his armour of cool politeness, Mounteagle set off on the appointed evening for the Park. A more unfortunate selection of a companion for him could not have been made

than Morton, who also went by himself. Mount-eagle arrived first, and was warmly greeted both by Mr. Courtenay and his daughter.

“I hardly hoped we should have prevailed on you to come to us,” said his host; “you have been so unwilling to go out lately. By-the-by, where is Morton? Didn’t he come with you?”

“He is following, I believe,” replied the young man, evading an explanation; but he felt Ethel’s eyes were fixed on him, and that she suspected something had gone wrong between them. He was not mistaken, for when, on Morton’s arrival, and dinner being announced, the Captain took down Miss Courtenay, the young lady falling to his lot, asked, as she took his arm to go to the dining-room,

“What is the matter between you and Captain Morton, that you would not come together?”

“We had a quarrel a few days ago,” he answered, looking at her steadily; and though, as he had determined, he never lost the cold politeness of his demeanour, yet by that glance she understood that the quarrel had in some way been on her account, and she derived encouragement from the conviction that, no mat-

ter how changed he might be towards her, he still could feel annoyed at his Captain's attention to her. He saw, a minute after he had spoken, that he had made a false move, for on their seating themselves, she at once addressed some observation to Captain Morton, who was on her other side. Mounteagle perceived this, and following the plan he had sketched out for himself, after a minute or two's patient waiting, that he might be sure she was doing it intentionally, he turned to Miss Courtenay, and made himself extremely agreeable to her throughout the whole of dinner time, drawing Mr. Courtenay also into the conversation, and forcing the other two either to assume the part of listeners, or else confine themselves to a *tête-à-tête*.

Of course this arrangement was quite to Captain Morton's taste, and while wondering at his subaltern's choice, he was extremely glad to profit by it, laying himself out to please the young lady to the best of his ability. And she was not easy to please that evening. Captain Morton could not at all account for it, but certainly he had never seen her so nearly cross before. She gave him short answers, and no smiles; she seemed pre-occupied, and yet cer-

tainly it was not the other people at table who engaged her attention, for she never once glanced at them. He felt very wretched, and he had intended to be so extremely happy. It was most provoking; he would have liked to get hold of those who had caused her this anxiety, and give them some annoyance also. Towards the end of the dinner she brightened a little, but gave the signal to leave very soon after the dessert was brought on the table, to her aunt's great displeasure.

“What made you leave table so soon?” she asked, as they entered the drawing-room. “I wanted a pear, and I had to go without it.”

“Oh! there are plenty in the store-room. I'll send and get you one now,” answered Ethel, lazily, reaching out her hand to the bell.

“No, it's not worth while,” said her aunt, stopping her. “I'd like to have stayed a few minutes longer there, for Mr. Mounteagle was very amusing, and he's such a good talker when he likes, it's a pleasure to hear him; besides, you had Captain Morton to amuse you, so I think you might have remained.”

“Don't mention that man to me again,” cried her niece, passionately; “I'm sick and tired of

him ! I never was so near hating a man before; and the worst of it is, I can't put him out of temper. I'd give a good deal to be able to get him into a towering rage, and make him say something that would give me an excuse for cutting him ever after. I do believe I'm getting tired of flirting, though it is a thing that never wearied me before ; but certainly there is a great deal of sameness about it ; it is very seldom you meet with a man who can put any originality into his love-making."

"Really, Ethel, the way you talk is something dreadful. I cannot think where you get such sentiments. I am sure you have never heard me express anything like them."

"No, that I give you my word I have not," laughed the young beauty, looking scornfully at her aunt's bony, upright, angular figure. "My experiences suggest the ideas to me, but I daresay you didn't have any to turn your thoughts in that direction."

"Bless the girl ! I am sure if experience makes people like you, it is a good thing if I didn't get any. Still, I think you must be mistaken, for after living so long in the world as I have done, it would be curious if I had not

picked up more knowledge of it than you."

"In some things I grant you, aunt," said Ethel, her amusement making her feel more amicably disposed; "but not in the matter of flirting and love-making. I'll try you. Define the difference between those two, and give me instances from personal knowledge."

"In my day, young girls knew nothing about such things," answered Miss Courtenay, drawing herself up stiffly. "The depravity of mind among young people now-a-days is something perfectly shocking!"

"What a dull life they must have had of it in your day, Aunt!" said the girl, leaning back in her chair, and laughing till the tears came into her eyes at the old lady's rigid and horror-struck face; "and what an idiotic set they must have been, if they really did know nothing about such things! That's what our grandmothers always tell us; but, for my part, I have my doubts. Flirting and love-making I believe to be as old as the hills—or even as you," she added, *sotto voce*; "and nature, being the same in all times and all ages, doubtless taught the beauties of a century ago as much about it as she teaches the belles of the present day; though

the former would not acknowledge it when they attained a respectable matronly age and standing—an unnecessary attempt at deception which, I hope, our generation will be too wise to repeat. If you like, I'll define the words for you, and give you examples out of my own history; I've no doubt you'll be the wiser, if you listen. Flirtation, then, I understand to be the attempt to amuse and be amusing to some other individual of the opposite sex, irrespective of any real feeling on either side—for once real feeling comes into play, with either one or other of the party, whichever it is that experiences it, that one ceases to flirt, and more or less forces the other to discontinue flirtation also. The other one may endeavour to keep it up longer, and may for a time succeed, but infallibly, sooner or later, will make mistakes, either from being drawn into taking too much interest, or from being frightened into taking too little, and the game is spoiled. Sham feeling there may be to any amount, or even, perhaps, real interest. Sham feeling, in some degree, is necessary to the piquancy of the game, but should be looked oftener than spoken. This is my idea of flirtation, pure and simple, without any adulteration

or admixture of other emotions. It is a very amusing game, if well played by two skilful performers; it requires a quick eye, a ready wit, and a good deal of natural talent for acting, but is, I am sorry to say, too prone to change into its frequent accompaniment, love-making. If you want to see a game of flirtation well played, watch Mr. Slingsby and me next time he comes here. As to the other thing, it is a much more serious affair than flirtation, and, to my mind, not nearly so pleasant. I can't work myself up into a corresponding state of feeling with the other party in the business—for this is a business, and not a game; and I don't care to feel that I am making a mess of the work, and not carrying out my share of the performance, as I should wish to do. Here again, however, the eyes do as much, if not more, than the tongue, which may be permitted liberty to express the sentiments also; but I think, in this arrangement, particularly if it is not likely to come to a happy termination, sighs play quite as large a part as anything else. It is too serious a matter for me, and I don't go in for it; it also permits of all the work being done on one side,

and, as an example of that kind of love-affair, I may cite Captain Morton and myself—for it has really got to that stage with him, and that's why I hate him, and wish he was out of this!"

"Well, I warned you how it would be," replied her aunt, "when I first saw that he was taken by you ; but, of course, you knew so much better than your elders, that you took your own way, and it serves you right now to find it is not a pleasant one. The poor man is to be pitied. He is a very nice, gentlemanly young fellow, and I suppose his life will be rendered wretched by the way in which you will treat him."

"Oh ! not at all," replied Ethel, smoothing out her handkerchief lazily ; "I am not such a cruel wretch as all that ! I shall let him dangle about after me till he is about to leave the place, then I have no doubt he will try to propose. I shall shirk that, if possible ; but if he will have it, I shall let him down as easily as I can—tell him I'm very sorry, and all that, but that it cannot be. He'll go off limp and washed-out looking, very likely, but it will do him no harm. In a year or so he will be as happy as ever, and will, probably, steer clear of any such fatal

rock as I shall have been, for ever after."

"You are, without exception, the most heartless girl I ever came across!" cried her aunt, indignantly. "I shall warn Captain Morton of the fate you have in store for him."

"Do so, aunt, by all means, and see how he'll thank you—that will be fun! I hope you'll let me be behind the curtains to see. I have no doubt he will be quite pleased at the interest you take in his affairs, and quite ready to fall into your views with regard to me. It would be so like a man in love to be pleased with that attention."

"I am only afraid," pursued her aunt, reflectively, without heeding Ethel's remarks, "that he may take it into his head to fancy it is jealousy of you that has prompted my interference. I should not like him to imagine that, and yet it is what men are very apt to believe of single women a little past their prime, as I am."

"She must have been slow in arriving at her prime," muttered Ethel, turning to the table, and taking up a book, in which she was soon, to all appearance, intensely interested; her real occupation meanwhile was wondering what

chance there was of Mounteagle's coming to talk to her when the gentlemen came up. She feared Morton would try to monopolise her attention, and she, having had enough of him for that evening, was fully determined to prevent his doing so. She was fortunate in her plans, for when they entered the room Mounteagle took up a position near the fire, and not far from where she was sitting. He was standing leaning against the chimney-piece, whilst Morton, who was just undergoing a severe cross-examination from Mr. Courtenay, on the respective merits of the foreign and English military systems, fidgeted from one foot to another, in his anxiety to get away, and take possession of a chair near Ethel, that was at that minute vacant. The young lady took this in at a glance, and smiling sweetly at Mounteagle, glanced at the seat, saying, "Won't you sit down? It is a long time since we have had a talk. I want to know what answer you will give me to the question I asked you in my note?"

He dropped into the chair lazily before he replied, and then said,

"Really, I can make no objection to anything

you desire. Of course your friendship is an honour that I am not worthy to aspire to, but that equally it is not in my power to refuse, without disgracing myself by rudeness such as I could not stoop to, especially where a lady is concerned."

He spoke coolly, and out aloud, as though they were discussing any ordinary topic of conversation; and Ethel, who saw Morton was attending half to them and half to her father, bit her lips with vexation.

"You need not speak so loud," she said in a low voice; "the matter we are talking of is private, and I don't want everyone to hear."

"Oh! certainly—I'll lower my voice if you wish it," he replied; "but that might give an erroneous impression, and lead Captain Morton to imagine there was something more between us than there is; he would certainly be annoyed, and perhaps might not make himself as agreeable to you as he generally does. Oh! here he is," he continued, as Morton, breaking at last from Mr. Courtenay, came towards them. As he spoke he rose, and saying, "I leave the pleasure of amusing you in better hands than mine," went over to Miss Courtenay, without

casting one glance on Ethel's flushed and troubled face.

Poor Morton had to pay for this little passage of arms between them, but not in the way that might have been expected. Instead of snubbing or driving him away, as many would have done in their vexation, she flirted with him even more than usual, knowing all the while that she was leading the man on with hopes that would never be realized—that she was weaving the web yet closer and closer around him, which should in its destruction shatter all the dearest and best prospects of his life. She knew it, but it mattered nothing to her ; she wished to show that other man that there were those as good as he, and better, who found her smiles sweet to see, and her words pleasant to hear ; that there were those who thought her approval recompence sufficient for any exertion ; her displeasure the heaviest trial that could befall them. So she played on every point of Morton's character, now waking every tender and happy feeling in him, then rousing anger and hate to life, as she turned with a word or smile to Mounteagle, who saw her game, and tried to keep aloof, but whom she made use of all the

same, exciting all the emotions of Morton's calm, brave nature, as a skilful player brings sounds, some sweet, some discordant, out of the same instrument, blending them all into one harmonious theme.

It was a night long to be remembered by Captain Morton, for it riveted the chains that had already been thrown around him ; it completed the wrong already begun ; it put the finishing touch to the dreamland castle he had built, and the fall of which must prove fatal to his happiness. But after this night he never imagined such a fall was possible—he was sure she loved him—he thought he had read it in her eyes, had heard it in her voice, when at best all he had seen there was the sham feeling of the flirt, which she had described to her aunt a short while before.

As to Mounteagle, he was almost beside himself with jealousy, and she saw it, without exactly knowing how far or why he experienced it ; his manner had so convinced her that now he cared little or nothing for her, that she attributed his extraordinary rudeness to herself, whenever he got an opportunity of being rude unobserved, to a petty envy of the attentions she

paid Morton, which was not caused by slighted love, but only by wounded pride. The evening was a hard one to her, and she well deserved it should be so. She was glad when they rose to take leave; presently she heard their vehicles drive off, her father coming back into the room after seeing them away, saying,

“Really, I can’t think what’s up between those two men—they won’t drive back together; and now Mounteagle has sent his trap home alone, and announced his intention of walking. I’d rather he had to do it than I, for though two miles is not much, the night is bright and cold; if I were he, I’d like to get in as quick as possible.”

Ethel smiled as she wished her father good night, and thought to herself that she had some idea why those two men could not get on together.

CHAPTER III.

FOR the next day or two after this dinner at the Park, Morton led a sufficiently uncomfortable life—that is to say, whenever he was in barracks; but most of his time he contrived to spend with the Courtenays. Mount-eagle had again been studying popularity, as he had determined on doing, and he made use of the power he had rapidly re-acquired among his comrades, to turn their minds as much as possible against the Captain. In this Morton's known character, and his sudden devotion to the heiress greatly assisted him. It certainly had rather a suspicious appearance, to anyone whose mind was sufficiently warped, to admit of putting on one side all the noble, upright principles that had always distinguished their Captain, and only considering the sentiments he had formerly avowed on the subject of love

—sentiments in which he now confessed himself to be mistaken.

“That’s all very well,” said his detractors, who, with Mounteagle at their head, frequently talked the matter over, “but of course he has to pretend he thinks differently, to prevent his mercenary views being too apparent; we know better than to believe all that he says on the subject.”

There were several among the detachment besides Attwood who admired Ethel Courtenay, and with all of them she was willing to flirt when opportunity offered; but Morton took care that should not be often, and the vigilance with which he mounted guard over her tended to keep alive the dislike that Mounteagle had aroused. Backed up thus by the support of the majority, and stung almost to madness by a jealousy that he directed all his energies to conceal, the subaltern spared no pains to annoy his Captain in every possible way in which he could safely do so. He knew the character of the man with whom he had to deal was so generous that vexations concerning only himself would be passed over, while anything that affected the discipline of the regiment would be

rigorously punished. Against Morton, then, all his ingenuity was exercised, and but for the hope with which he was buoyed up, the Captain's temper and spirit must have suffered under the constant system of petty annoyance, and the covert sneers launched at him on every side.

Thus matters went on for a week or more, Mounteagle hardly ever seeing Ethel, and when he did meet her, avoiding her persistently ; she, wearying herself with efforts to attract him, and when he was not near, flirting more than ever with Morton, who lived all the time in a fool's paradise, of which she constituted the Eve, though if he had fancied her the serpent he would have been nearer the truth. Mounteagle had written once to Clara Singleton since his last letter, in which he mentioned Morton's flirtation, but had said nothing that could lead Clara to think he found the heiress in any way attractive. Her mind was soothed and set at rest by this letter. It explained the report Mr. Matthews had told her ; evidently Slingsby had mistaken the old friendship that had existed between Mounteagle and the Courtenays for something more than it really was, and so had classed him in the same category with Morton.

She wrote a pleasant, chatty letter to her friend, telling him all the camp news, and expressing a hope that they would be recalled from detachment before long.

“That’s more than I do,” muttered Mounteagle as he read the letter. “I don’t feel at all equal to going in again for that flirtation, once I have seen Ethel Courtenay a second time—indeed, I wish now I’d never begun it, as I foresee it will prove a bore.”

Tossing the letter from him, he snatched up his hat, and went out for a walk, turning almost unconsciously in the direction of the Park. He walked on and on for some time, without being aware of where he was going, and only aroused himself from his reverie as he found the old gatekeeper opening the Park gate to admit him. For a minute he was inclined to turn away, and pursue his walk elsewhere; then he thought, that finding himself where he was, he might as well enter, and profit by the shelter the undergrowth afforded, to enjoy his stroll in a warmer temperature than could be found out in the open country, over which a chill nor'-westerly wind was blowing.

He had no intention of going up to the house,

and turning down a quiet, shady path through the woods, left the great avenue behind him. His thoughts were busy reviewing the situation in which he was placed. Matters were getting serious, and he was becoming desperate. If nothing else resulted from all this, his expulsion from the service would, he was pretty sure. Affairs were getting worse day by day between him and Morton; some time soon he would commit a flagrant breach of discipline he was certain, which would compel his Captain to report him; an investigation would follow, and he well knew what he had to expect, if once matters went as far as that. He didn't care, he told himself; why should he care? He would lose his profession certainly, but he had ceased to take any interest or pleasure in that, or in anything, so long as he could not obtain the desire of his heart. It was all very well telling him that he was much better without it, and that if he won it for himself, he would probably soon get tired of it. It might be so; he did not think it, however: as far as his knowledge of his own heart went, it told him a different tale; but even supposing it were so, that did not comfort him now, or make his trial one

whit easier to bear. Day and night this one thought accompanied his solitude, there was no happiness, no contentment for him, until he should have won Ethel Courtenay for his wife. That it was possible she could ever love him as he did her, he doubted; but that she might come to feel an interest in him, which would give him a chance of success, he had until now believed. He had counted on his personal good looks as a powerful agent in winning her regard, ignorant of the fact that as a rule a man's appearance has but little to do with the feelings a woman entertains for him; and he had on this built his hopes of cutting out Captain Morton, whenever it should please him to do so.

Now, however, Morton was getting far before him in the race—at least, so he believed. As this conviction forced itself upon him, he ground his teeth together, and swore a deep oath his Captain should rue the day when he came between him and his love. But how should he accomplish this? What revenge was there which he might attempt with safety to himself, that would put his rival out of his way at once and for ever; that was a difficult question to solve. There were ways of doing it no doubt, but they

were all more or less fraught with danger. He must think the matter over. He sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree, and tried to arrange a plan of action in his mind.

He formed a picturesque object in the landscape as he sat thus, with the cold Autumn sunshine falling across him, and lighting up the cruel, evil expression of his dark face. He had never looked so thoroughly what he was, the embodiment of a powerful but lost spirit, as he did then, when devising in what way he could have vengeance on his rival, and bring misery to the man who had ever been kind and forbearing to him. The bad look on his countenance struck Ethel Courtenay with a kind of cold fear, as she came riding towards him over the soft, grass-grown pathway, and for a minute it dawned on on her that this man, with whom her thoughts had been so much occupied lately, was dangerous. Dangerous not only to others, but to her, if she should ever fall into his power; and latterly she was well aware she had begun to fancy such a thing might be possible. She had longed to entrap him. Was it possible she had been caught in her own snare? She felt very like it sometimes; she felt so again now, as she halted

and watched his scowling, downcast face, unobserved. There was misery as well as evil written on that face, and feelings to which she dared not give a name moved her as she thought, "It is for my sake he is miserable ; I am the cause of his trouble. I can cure it. But would it be wise to cure it?" something within her urged. Whatever name the emotions that had arisen in her might bear, were they strong enough to enable her to make the sacrifice that would alone satisfy him. How she might have decided if longer time had been given her for consideration, she never knew, for just then her horse snorted and pawed the ground impatiently. With a start Mounteagle looked up, whilst she rode on instantly, anxious that he should not guess she had been standing watching him. As she approached he rose, bowed, and would have passed her, but she stopped and held out her hand, saying,

"Wait ; won't you speak to me ? You are very unforgiving."

She had determined, as she stopped and spoke to him, to put an end to the state of estrangement existing between them ; and dismounting as she spoke, she proposed that they should sit down and talk over old times.

It was all over with them then. Before many minutes had passed, Ethel Courtenay had promised to be his wife ; and he, fearful that she, if she became acquainted with his history, might repent the step she had taken, exacted from her the most binding engagement he could devise, though well aware it was dishonourable of him to take advantage of her ignorance of his antecedents, while he believed that, in spite of all her promises, she would break with him if she discovered the secret of his birth. He was thinking thus when she cried hurriedly :

“ For mercy’s sake, mount me quickly, I see Aunt Caroline coming through the trees. Thanks, I’m all right,” she added, as he hurriedly put her up. “ What ever persuaded that old woman to come this way to-day ? I’ll ride on to meet her ; do you hide among the laurels there till she has passed.”

Mounteagle did as he was told, while Ethel trotted on, and presently met her aunt.

“ Why, aunt,” she cried, “ how came you to be out so late to-day, and on this wet path ? Aren’t you afraid of the evening air getting down your chest, or the damp of the ground striking through your shoes ? I think you had better go home.”

“ You are not usually so thoughtful,” answered the old lady, tartly. “ You are quite right in saying the air is bad for anyone after two o’clock in the day; I wish you would remember that oftener, and act on it sometimes. As to the damp, I have on goloshes, though I know they are unwholesome for the feet; but the fact of the matter is, that stupid man Billings gave me a piece of bread at lunch that I am quite confident had not been more than a day and a half baked, at the very outside. He said there was none staler in the house; and I, being hungry, ate it—an imprudence I have regretted ever since. I feel it lying like a lump of lead on my chest, so I thought I had better come out and take a second constitutional, to walk it down. You really must speak about the bread, my dear; nothing under two days old should be allowed into the house, and never was when I was mistress. You will everyone of you be martyrs to indigestion if you don’t stop that destructive practice you have of eating bread fresh from the baker’s.”

“ Well, I’m quite certain if I get bread two days old not a soul in the house will eat it but yourself. It was only the other day cook told

me Billings had been finding fault because he didn't get hot rolls for his breakfast. Muffins, he said, not being in London, he was willing to do without, as he didn't approve of anyone being unreasonable, and would never set the example himself; but hot bread of some sort he considered his right, and would be much obliged to Mrs. Merrick if she would tell me so. I told her to tell Billings I had no objection to giving him board wages, and letting him find himself in muffins or crumpets either, whichever he preferred; but I have heard nothing from him since, so I hope that's settled."

"And what have you been doing down here, Ethel? I should say it was a great deal too damp a place to be pleasant for riding; and it seems to me, from the horse's footmarks, you must have been keeping him standing."

"Oh! I was trying to see if I could find out a better definition of love-making than the one I gave you the other day. This is a damp spot, and you'd better come on quickly."

The girl laughed to herself as she rode on before her aunt, and thought of the answer she had just given her, which came so dangerously near the truth, if the old lady could have under-

stood it. One of the best qualities about Ethel Courtenay was a strong leaning to the truth, even when she most wished to deceive; and though she knew discovery would be almost fatal at this stage and in this way to her hopes, yet she would not stoop to invent any excuse for her stopping in that spot other than the one she had given, which was in itself the truth.

“Please don’t trouble me with any more of the absurd nonsense you were talking the other night; indeed, if you like to canter on you may, as I shall go round home by the circular walk, and you may want to take a longer ride. And mind you don’t forget to speak about the bread,” cried Miss Courtenay after her, as Ethel gathered up her reins and started off at a hand gallop through the woodland.

Mounteagle, crouched among the evergreens, had watched the two ladies approach, and had even received a smile from his betrothed, as she glanced in the direction in which he lay hidden. He had overheard their conversation, and Ethel’s imprudent answer to the question about what she had been doing. The barefaced nature of the reply almost made

him burst out laughing ; it was but a small joke perhaps, but then when one is in love, a very little wit from the beloved object goes a great way. He restrained himself, however, till they were both out of sight ; then rising from his cramped position, he shook himself, and set out on his way home, very well satisfied with his day's work. He had never hoped to be so successful ; it was a triumph beyond his wildest anticipations, and he whistled gaily in the lightness of his heart as he set out on his way back to Merriton. How changed everything appeared to him since the morning, and how changed he was himself ! He felt in peace with all men ; even the keen, cold wind seemed balmy and refreshing as it swept by him, and the leafless trees bending before it were no longer the gaunt, weird symbols of a faded life, as they had appeared to him earlier in the day. No sooner had he entered barracks than Slingsby, meeting him, exclaimed,

“ Hulloa ! what's up with you ? You look as if you had found the Koh-i-noor at least ; really this must be a fortunate day for the regiment—two strokes of luck befalling members of it in one day.”

“ Why, what’s happened now ? ” asked Matthews, lounging up.

“ Don’t you see Mounteagle has found his temper ? —which I may add has been missing this long time. I’m going to chalk a white mark on my top-boots—the ones I keep the porter in, you know—to commemorate this day.”

“ What are you trying to say about your boots ? ” laughed Mounteagle. He was so thoroughly happy he could even bear this chaff about his temper—a liberty that a few hours ago would have occasioned a regular, scrimmage.

“ I was only alluding to my cellar, ” answered Slingsby ; “ you see I like to keep a few bottles of stout up there, the very best, I can assure you, to refresh myself with when I come in from drill, &c. I know very well if I put them in any of my lock-up places, somehow or other my servant would get at them, and the beggar would probably derive more advantage from them than I would ; I also know he would never go near my boots, for fear by any chance he might be reminded they wanted cleaning, so I pop half-a-dozen of porter into my hunting boots—they

stow away splendidly three in each boot—and the fellow has actually never discovered it; don't you think that's a good idea? My patent safety-cellar I call it, and lots of fellows really think I have a first-rate lock-up somewhere."

"A very good plan no doubt, and as like you as anything could possibly be," answered Mount-eagle. "I say here's Morton," and breaking from the other two, the young man walked straight up to the Captain, and in the excess of his happiness, held out his hand, saying, "I believe I have been behaving very badly to you lately; I am extremely sorry, and hope you will forgive me, and grant me an opportunity of proving my sincerity, and regaining your friendship."

Morton looked at him rather oddly, taking his hand almost with reluctance, as he answered :

"You have annoyed me dreadfully, and you cannot wonder if I feel almost afraid to renew my intimacy with you, after the treatment I have received latterly at your hands. I won't refuse to make it up, however, as I suppose you intend it for a kind of congratulation on the good news I this day heard."

“I was not aware you had heard any good news,” Mounteagle answered; “but I have been feeling rather ashamed of my late conduct this afternoon, and determined to try to do better; the first step to that was obtaining your friendship again, if you could be induced to pardon and overlook my shameful behaviour. I say, what’s that fellow doing with my colt? Excuse me a minute, I’ll be back presently;” so saying, Mounteagle dashed out after his young horse, that had just been led past the window, leaving Morton looking after him speechless from astonishment.

“What was that Mounteagle was saying to you?” asked Matthews, coming up; he had seen some earnest conversation was passing between them, and he was very anxious to know what it was all about.

“Did any of you tell him of my good fortune?” inquired Morton eagerly, by way of reply.

“No,” said Matthews; “we were chaffing him when you came up about his being in such an uncommonly good temper, and we thought wonders never would cease, when we saw him go up to speak to you. Depend on it, what-

ever has happened, it's something good for him that makes him so pleased, and not anything relating to you. I don't think he can have heard anything about you, for I am sure he saw nobody since he entered the barracks but us three."

"Well, look here, don't any of you mention my luck at mess—I'll tell him myself afterwards; I shall then be able to judge whether he had heard of it before, or whether it was some private cause made him suddenly so friendly."

Though greatly puzzled to imagine what could be Morton's reason for wishing to pursue such a course, everyone readily gave the required promise; and the casual mention the Captain himself had made of it had so little excited Mounteagle's curiosity that his mind never reverted to the subject again, and he asked no questions.

CHAPTER IV.

MESS was over; Mounteagle had gone up to his room, to muse in solitude over his happiness; the others had scattered themselves about in groups here and there, trying to wile away the long autumnal evening as best they might; and among all, the prevailing topic of conversation was Morton's wonderful stroke of good fortune. He had followed Mounteagle upstairs, and the latter had hardly enjoyed his pleasant dream before the fire for more than a minute or two, when he was disturbed by a knock at the door.

“Confound it! who's coming bothering here now?” he muttered, then shouted to the visitor whoever it might be to “come in.” A minute more and the door opened, revealing to his astonished eyes the face and figure of Captain Morton. Mounteagle's temporary irritation at

the intrusion vanished at once; he was so thoroughly happy that he felt a longing to be at peace with all men, more especially with Morton, to whom he knew he had behaved badly, and whom he was even now ousting in the favour of the woman they both loved. He was surprised that Morton showed such alacrity in making friends with him—he had not expected it, from what he had read in his manner before mess, but he was better pleased that it should be so, and he welcomed his visitor with great cordiality, placing him in the most comfortable chair before the fire, and offering him his best cigars before proceeding to conversation.

“ You told me you had not heard of my good luck,” said Morton, abruptly, after smoking for a minute in silence—“ is it possible nobody told you ?”

“ I have not the least idea to what you refer,” replied Mounteagle. “ If you have been lucky, I congratulate you most sincerely, I think myself I have been more fortunate than usual to-day, but not in any way that would interest others. Your good fortune, however, seems to be public property, so of course you won’t mind telling me.”

“No, indeed,” answered Morton, heartily, satisfied that his subaltern was saying exactly what was the case, and perceiving that the idea which had for a moment flashed through his mind, that Mounteagle wished to make up with him because he might now be of use, was false and ungenerous. “I came up,” he continued, “on purpose to tell you, in case you hadn’t heard. I received a letter this morning from some lawyers in London, telling me that an uncle of mine, whom, by the way, I had never met, was dead, and had left me somewhere about thirty thousand pounds—rather a pleasant piece of news to get before breakfast of a morning, don’t you think? I’m not over-fond of money, I’m sure, but when I read that, I could have danced for joy. Not that it improved my appetite, however—rather the contrary, I should say. This is what everybody has been congratulating me on all day, and I thought you had come to do the same when you spoke to me just now.”

“Well, I didn’t know it before, but I wish you joy most sincerely now. I shouldn’t object to such a trick of fortune at all myself,” answered Mounteagle, thinking how smooth it

would make all difficulties in his way if he could tell Mr. Courtenay he was possessor of such a sum when he went to ask him for his daughter's hand. His reverie was interrupted by Morton speaking again.

"You see," he said, "as we're friends once more, and as I couldn't talk to most of our fellows about it, for reasons you will understand presently, if you'll let me, I'll tell you why I am so particularly glad of this fortune, and what I did to-day as soon as I heard of it. You have seen that I love Miss Courtenay, and even though you may not care about her, your heart being already pre-occupied, I think you cannot wonder at what I feel for her. I'll not go into a lover's rhapsodies about her—that would be dull for you to listen to"—(he was very dull himself, or very pre-occupied, not to notice the curious expression on Mounteagle's face)—"but I'll tell you what I intend to do now, and what I did to-day. I had never dared propose for her as long as I was a poor beggar, with only three or four hundred a year besides my pay. I knew well her father wouldn't hear of it; and I was afraid she didn't care enough for me to risk displeasing him."

“I should think not,” muttered Mounteagle.

“Did you speak? I thought you did. Never mind; I was just going to tell you that as soon as I could get out to-day after receiving that letter, I went to the Park, and told Mr. Courtenay that I wished to marry his daughter, letting him know my prospects and intentions, if he would give her to me—that is to say, in case she consents; for, as I told him, I had not asked her yet; and I really could not be quite sure whether she would take me till I had spoken to her. I think she likes me though,” he added, gazing into the fire, and falling into a fit of musing, while Mounteagle smoked away furiously, endeavouring to keep himself cool, and not betray his secret—at least until he had heard all.

“Well, and what did Papa Courtenay say?” asked Mounteagle at length, when he saw a question was necessary to rouse Morton from dreamland.

“He was very kind, said there was nobody he would like better for a son-in-law, and that he hoped my suit would be successful with his daughter. He even wished to use his influence over her to induce her to consent, for fear she

should be inclined to make any objections ; but I said I would rather she was left to herself. I could not be happy if I thought she only took me because she was told to do so. Mr. Courtenay also said, what I thought very extraordinary, that at one time he had feared you liked his daughter, and as he believed you to be too wild to make her a good husband, he should be very glad the matter was settled this way. I assured him he was mistaken—you had told me enough of your personal history for me to be certain of that, and we then talked over the business part of it. If she will have me, I am to leave the army, and we may settle down wherever we like. We arranged everything very amicably—he was extremely liberal, and I went away without seeing Ethel. She was out walking. However, I intend going over there the first thing to-morrow, obtaining her consent, and then setting off for London, to see these men about my business."

Mounteagle had held his tongue, and kept very quiet while listening to the tale of his rival's success, which at least assured him of one thing—namely, that he was certain of her father's opposition ; but when he heard Morton

call his betrothed by name with a kind of air of proprietorship in which he had no right to indulge, the young man's anger could no longer be controlled; but though his heart beat quick, and his lips trembled as he spoke, he managed to command himself sufficiently to say only :

“It would be better that for the present you should call her Miss Courtenay, until you know her own wishes on the subject.”

Morton looked at him with surprise.

“I can't see that it makes any difference when I am talking to you confidentially, and I don't know why you object; I shall call her what I please until she refuses me, which I confess I don't think likely, after the manner in which she has always treated me.”

“Mere ordinary civility,” replied Mounteagle. “You think because she has tried to please and amuse you, as your hostess should, that she is ready and willing to marry you the minute you propose to her; but I can tell you she won't, as she is already engaged to me, and I have a right to desire that you shall not speak of her in any way that is displeasing to me.”

Mounteagle was standing up now, leaning

against the chimney-piece, and looking down on his astonished Captain with blazing, indignant eyes. For a few minutes Morton was convinced the young man had gone suddenly mad, and that his delusion was the supposition he was engaged to Miss Courtenay. The idea was too preposterous to be true ; in all the time the detachment had been at Merriton, he did not think those two had ever spoken to each other a dozen times ; besides he remembered telling Ethel the story of Mounteagle's prior attachment, and she did not seem much interested either in it or in him. Decidedly the man was mad. He thought thus for a-while, but presently, when Mounteagle calmed down a little, relit his cigar, and sitting down, apologized to Morton for his vehemence, saying, "But you know you couldn't expect a fellow to take it quietly, hearing another talk of the woman he was engaged to like that," the Captain began to see there must really be something in the matter. He was staggered by the suddenness of the discovery, and covered his face with his hands, that the man before him, his successful rival, might not read his agony in his face. Was this to be the end of all ; the end of

his true, honest love, the end of her alluring smiles and tender glances, the end of his low-spoken words, that conveyed in their very tones all the feeling of his heart, and to which she had responded by looks that seemed full of love? If this was the end of all, how had he been deceived! with what cruel art had he been led on to give everything, where nothing would be given in return! how had he been tempted to wreck his life on the barren, delusive promise of a coquette's smiles! It was too bitter, the thought of all that he had ventured and lost, of the deception that had betrayed him so utterly. He could have groaned aloud in wretchedness of spirit, but that his rival sat there beside him, and he would not give him the gratification of witnessing his misery.

Then a thought came to his rescue, born of the greatness of his despair, and as a drowning man catches at a straw, he caught at this poor ray of hope, and clung to it, as the only comfort to which he could turn in this distress. Mr. Courtenay he knew would not consent to Mount-eagle's marrying his daughter. Finding this to be the case, was it likely she would brave her father's displeasure, and remain true to her

lover? He thought not—he thought she would be much more likely to accept him as the husband appointed for her, and that in this way he might still gain the desire of his heart. A few minutes before, and he had declared he would not take her except of her own free will; now, in his pain and misery, when he found that happiness could not be his, he was willing to take her anyhow, to use any means that might result in her marriage with him. He was so sure that, once his, she would learn to love him, that he could see no danger in such a future; he would be so tender, so patient, so true, so much more in every way to her than that other man could ever be, that his devotion would win its reward at last, and she would love him better than she had ever fancied she could love, in her foolish, impetuous youth.

As these thoughts came into his mind, and he took comfort from them, he raised his head, calm and serene as ever, for he would not let Mounteagle read in his face symptoms of suffering, and said,

“Mr. Courtenay will never give you his daughter. I know that; but this is a subject we two cannot discuss. I would not have men-

tioned it to you, but that I thought you had no concern in the matter, and most of the others I knew felt as I do. We must be rivals, we cannot help that, but let us at least be friendly on other points. I thought you were safe from this madness, because of what you told me long ago, about your caring for some other woman."

"For no other woman have I ever cared but this one," answered the young man, proudly. "She treated me badly once, but she is changed now, and it is not likely that I would remember my anger against her, when I found she had learnt to like me. But friends we cannot be. You know what I am, and you know also that if matters went wrong with me—if Mr. Courtenay encouraged you, and refused to allow me to see her, I should behave as badly to you as ever, or worse. No, let us keep apart—it is best so. We can then fight openly and fairly against each other; I warn you I will shrink from no way, whether good or bad, that shall gain for me the fulfilment of my wishes."

Without another word Morton got up and went out, hardly knowing how he reached the door, or found the way to his own room. There

the fire had gone out, and all was cold, dark, and desolate, but he heeded it not ; he was as one stunned, and leant against the wall, moaning in his misery, and wishing that he had died before the knowledge of all this had come upon him. That he should have been so deceived was the sting ; that she should be capable of this deception—she whom he had honoured and revered as the noblest and best of women, as the truest and most tender-hearted ! He had formed an ideal, an embodiment of every virtue, and this he had clothed with her likeness, and believed to be her. When illusion was thus rudely dispelled, the awakening to the true state of the case was bitter—all the more bitter that the old adoration would still cling to the shattered idol, though the virtues for which it had at first been adored no longer adorned it.

How could he get through life now, when all his faith in what he had once revered had been destroyed ? He was worse off than ever he had been ; the careless indifference that had once been his boast could be his no more ; his old theory that others were as good as those that were unattainable held no comfort for

him. Time, and the work appointed for him in life, might deaden the pain that then tormented him ; of course they would do so, or mortal nature could not bear it. But the pain, though dulled, would not be banished ; the wound, though closed, would not be healed. A chance word, a familiar object, would cause it to open and bleed again—would rouse the keen anguish that utter forgetfulness alone could soothe.

To-morrow—the day on which he had thought so hopefully of seeing her—to-morrow he must go and tell Mr. Courtenay what had happened ; of the destruction of his hopes, of the misery in which he had been plunged. Doubtless by that time Mounteagle would have told him also, and so the task would be easier, if anything could be easier, where all was so painful and miserable. Up and down the room he paced, trying to keep down the rebellious thoughts that rose within him. Life was hard, and to him, in his present state of mind, the decrees of Providence seemed cruelly unjust. Had not he deserved this happiness ten times more than that other man, who had brought disorder and mischief with him wherever he showed his

face? He had been an upright, God-fearing man; he had tried to do his duty in the state of life in which he was placed, and this was his reward; the one object on which he had set his heart was withheld from him—nay more, was given to one who, he said to himself bitterly, had never in any way deserved it. He forgot in his sorrow that indulgence does not always mean kindness, and that the desire, if granted, might prove a curse instead of a blessing. Grief had hardened his heart, and he could not accept as right a decision that denied him the dearest wish he had ever known.

Far into the night his weary, monotonous tramp was kept up; his comrades, hearing it, decided that Morton was a strange fellow, to be thus disturbed by the good fortune that had that day befallen him. They little knew what a mockery that inheritance seemed to him. In the morning he had rejoiced over it, as one of the best things that could have happened to him; now it was bitter to him, its worthlessness to purchase what alone he desired making it hateful to him. Thus the night wore on, and overwrought nature at last forced him to lie down; but even then sleep would not visit his

troubled brain. Still the same thoughts chased each other through his mind—still the same wild rebellion against his lot rose in his heart ; and when morning dawned and he rose again, to meet the cares and troubles of the day, no blessed oblivion of his suffering had visited and relieved his mind during the long hours of darkness.

When Mounteagle was left alone, he threw his cigar into the fire, and set himself to think seriously over the position in which he found himself. That Mr. Courtenay would withhold his consent was certain—that she would remain true to him he looked upon as certain also ; there had been a reality in her emotion that could not have been feigned, and Mounteagle, suspicious and jealous by nature, felt very sure that in this instance he was safe. But of course to-morrow Mr. Courtenay would hear all. Morton would no doubt tell him of this unexpected failure of their plans ; unless he could see her beforehand, she would be taken unawares, and bullied, perhaps, into promising anything. He must see her, and warn her of what was about to happen. He looked at his watch ; it was but nine o'clock, and he deter-

mined on going over at once, and seeing if he could attract her attention, and have a few minutes' conversation with her before she retired to rest.

He had no sooner thought of this plan, than he at once proceeded to put it into execution. He set off walking at a brisk pace, and soon left the town behind him. The night was cold and blustering, but there was no rain, and at the pace at which he strode along he soon reached the Park. It was too late to seek entrance by any of the gates, and would have excited comment; the wall, old and weatherbeaten, was easily climbed, and soon he was standing outside her window. Her room was at one end of the house, apart from any other inhabited apartments. The rooms near hers were those usually reserved for visitors, and there being no one staying at the Park at that time, Mount-eagle knew he was safe in adopting what would otherwise have been a very dangerous course.

She was not there when he came, but he knew by this time it must be half-past nine, and as they were people who kept early regular hours, he was pretty sure to see her before long.

He had not to wait even as long as he had expected, for at that minute a light came into her room, and he could see her open a drawer, and begin searching for something. Then he commenced whistling an air he had frequently heard her humming, going over it again and again, until he saw her raise her head and listen ; he repeated it louder, on which she went to the window, opened it, and looked out. Her eyes at once fell on him standing below, and she exclaimed, nervously :

“ What is the matter ? Is anything wrong ? ”
“ Nothing but what we can put right, I hope,” he replied ; “ but it was necessary I should see you to-night, as I didn’t know when your father might speak to you on the subject connected with which I am about to talk to you. I cannot speak to you, however,” he went on, “ whilst you remain up there, and I am down here. Can you not manage to steal out for a few minutes, without your absence being perceived ? —I will not keep you long.”

“ Very well,” she answered ; “ I’ll just go down, and say I am tired and wish to go to my room—no one will think of me again till to-morrow morning. You know the glass door

near the library, wait outside there, and I will be with you shortly."

She disappeared from the room, and he walked round to the other side of the house, where was the door she had mentioned. He hid himself among the bushes near by, and waited. How slowly the time appeared to pass!—he was restless and anxious, and his enforced quiet was distressing to him. The ten minutes or so that really elapsed while he stood there, appeared an interminable age, and he was beginning to fear something had occurred to prevent her coming, when he heard the low, grating sound of a key cautiously turned in a lock; then the door opened and she came forth, shutting it behind her, and bringing out the key, in order, as she wisely observed, that she might not be locked out.

"Be quick now!" she whispered, as she approached her lover; "Aunt Caroline goes round the house every night, and looks at all the doors and windows to see that they are properly secured; there are no bolts to this door, only the key, and she will think it is locked because the key is not there; but if she should try it, and find it open, there would be a row. What is the matter?"

As briefly as he could, Mounteagle related all that Morton had told him, and pointed out to her how sure they were of her father's opposition, adding that she would have to choose between Morton and wealth on one hand, himself and poverty on the other.

"But I have chosen you already, Herbert," she said fondly, "and no one can induce me to alter my decision."

"Yes," he answered, gravely; "but if your father refuses his consent, we have nothing to do but submit. You are not of age, and therefore cannot act as you please in this matter."

"Don't forsake me!" she sobbed, clinging to him; "I am willing to give up all for you, only don't leave me, or I shall be made to marry this man that I detest. As long as you are near me, I shall be strong enough to do battle for us both; if you go, I shall not have strength left to resist for my own sake, what I only care about for yours. Why should we not go away now at once, and be married in London to-morrow? Surely that is possible, and it is the only way in which I can escape feeling my father's anger."

But this haste did not at all suit Mounteagle's

views; he desired very earnestly to marry her with money, if possible—but if that was not possible, why then, without it. The first plan would certainly not succeed, if they ran away at once, without waiting to try to work Mr. Courtenay over. If the worst came to the worst, he could always secure her in the end by an elopement, but just yet that was a course which he would not contemplate. She did not understand why he would not consent to that arrangement, and feared that, after all, she was mistaken, and he did not care for her. She began to cry and bemoan herself, saying she was afraid of her father's anger when he heard the state of the case.

This was indeed true—more true than Mount-eagle believed it to be; he did not understand her impatience to leave her father's house in company with him whom, until that day, she had never professed to love, and he believed her fear to be feigned. It was not so, however—she knew that though a fond parent as long as everything went right, Mr. Courtenay was stern and unforgiving; and she had horrible visions of being separated from her lover for three long years, if they did not get away at

once. And not only would she lose sight of him for that weary time, but also she thought it quite possible he might learn to forget her ; while her very troubles would serve to keep him in her memory. He was flattered at her evident love for him, and soothed her as tenderly as he could, whilst steadily rejecting her entreaties, and telling her that now their happiness depended on her working over Mr. Courtenay to their side. By degrees her sobs subsided—she began to see there was wisdom in his plan, and she listened attentively to his instructions for carrying it out. He promised, whether he was allowed to see her or not, he would remain true to her, and she determined that, as long as he was so, her courage should not fail, and that she would set herself steadily to accomplish the object they had in view. Just as she had come to this resolution, and with many protestations of love and faith, they were about to separate, lights were seen moving about in the house, voices were heard calling, and in fact it was evident there was a prodigious bustle going on.

“I can’t get in just yet,” whispered Ethel —“they are all about the library. Do you

think they have discovered that I am out?"

"That is hardly possible," he answered; "and even were it so, if you stand quiet here with me, no one will see us. They might search everywhere about, and yet miss us here, just in the shadow."

"I am so frightened!" she went on. "What should I do if papa discovered me now? This would be fifty times worse than refusing Captain Morton."

"I should think so," muttered Mounteagle, watching the lights anxiously, and feeling decidedly nervous.

If they were discovered, that would be a termination to the day's adventures on which he had never calculated; he could not tell exactly how it would affect them, or how he could turn it to his advantage. Keeping Ethel quiet, however, gave him so much to do, that he could hardly think collectedly. She was almost beside herself with fear, and wished to rush in at all hazards, and trust to chance that her entrance might not be perceived. As he was trying to restrain her from this course, the little door was thrown open, and a long ray of light streamed out into the dark night

from a candle borne aloft by Miss Courtenay. In another minute a gust of wind blew out the light, and everything was enveloped in the natural gloom of an autumnal night; but that short glimpse had shown them Mr. Courtenay behind his sister, and a long train of servants one after the other, all with solemn, mysterious faces, as though bent on an important errand. What they were looking for soon became known, as Miss Courtenay's thin, aged voice rang through the night, calling "Ethel! Ethel!" The girl started when she heard her name through the darkness, and became aware that her absence was discovered. Then she turned and clung to her lover.

"Don't leave me," she whispered—"they will go to search for me, and then I can steal in; but don't leave me till then!"

"Be calm, my darling," he answered; "I will not leave you. See, already they have passed us—we shall soon be safe."

But he uttered his self-congratulations too soon, for though Mr. Courtenay and the servants went out through the shrubberies, Miss Courtenay remained standing at the door, every now and then raising her voice in a shrill call for Ethel.

"I wish to goodness she'd stop that and go in!" said the girl, trembling excessively from cold and fear. "What shall I do if they return and fasten the door?"

"My poor child," he answered tenderly, for he was also getting uneasy as to what the termination might be, "it is I who have got you into this scrape; what should you say to our coming forward boldly now, and my announcing how it is between us, and telling what brought me here? That is the only way I can think of to avoid the servants seeing us together, and making a terrible scandal. Miss Courtenay will let us in if I say I want to speak to her brother."

"Is that the best way?—is it the only way?" she asked, clinging to him in her distress. "I am so afraid they will have you sent away, and that I shan't see you again; and I dare not face my aunt after this—indeed I can't!"

"Would you rather run in alone to your aunt now, and tell her you have been out for a walk? She will not know you have had anyone with you; and though she may be angry, she can't prove that you were doing anything very wrong. I will wait here till the coast is clear, and then make my escape."

“Yes, I’ll do that,” she answered; “and don’t forget to come and speak to papa to-morrow.”

Slipping quietly away, she gained the path a few yards off, and in a minute or two came running towards the door, as if unaware anyone was there, and in a hurry to get in.

“Pray, Miss Ethel, what is the meaning of this?” asked her aunt, stepping forward as she was about to enter. “Since when have you taken to going out between ten and eleven at night?”

“Oh! aunt, is that you?” cried the girl, acting surprise very well. “I had a bad headache, and took a run out in the cool to cure it; I didn’t think you’d discover I was out.”

“No, I don’t suppose you did,” answered the old lady, “or else you’d hardly have done it. Your father and all the servants have gone out looking for you.”

“How very stupid!” said Ethel, calmly and clearly, every word she uttered reaching to where her lover crouched hidden among the laurel; “they might have known I’d come in as soon as I had been out long enough. I’m cold, aunt; won’t you let me in?”

This she said because she heard them all re-

turning, and she felt ashamed of being seen by the servants, feeling as though they would be able to read in her face that she had not been alone.

“Why, they’ve been down to the yard and got Brutus!” she continued, turning sick with fright, as she heard the scampering and rushing of the large mastiff, generally kept down at the yard, as he dashed in amongst the bushes in search of something to hunt. “Brutus! Brutus!” she called, anxious above all things to get hold of him, and on pretence of fondling him, keep him quiet until her return was known, and she could get him sent quietly back to his kennel.

He came bounding towards her; he was very fond of her, and now he jumped upon her, and rubbed himself against her, with every expression of pleasure, until Mr. Courtenay approached.

“Ah, you are here!” he said sternly; and Ethel felt her heart sink within her as she heard the tone of his voice. “What have you been doing out so late?” Then motioning the servants to pass him and go in, he repeated again, “What have you been doing?”

Still holding the dog by one ear, Ethel looked up with a timid, imploring glance into her father's face.

"I didn't think it would be any harm," she muttered. "I had a headache, and I went out to take a run."

"Let go that dog!" answered her father sternly. "I must see if there is anything else in this that I have not yet discovered. Seek it out, Brutus!" And he waved his hand to the dog, while Ethel clasped hers on her heart, in an agony of terror lest Mounteagle should not have made his escape before this.

A minute or two more, and a sullen growl and angry bay from the dog among the bushes near warned her that all was over; and while she covered her face with her hands, and strove vainly to repress her sobs, her father turned into the thicket, and following the voice of the mastiff, came upon him presently, keeping a man at bay in the midst of the laurel thicket.

"Come to the house with me, sir, whoever you may be," said Mr. Courtenay, in quiet ominous tones. "This matter must be cleared up, and I cannot tell by this light who you are."

“ You shan’t need light to know,” answered the intruder. “ I am Mounteagle, of the —th; I am engaged to marry your daughter, if you will give your consent; and having heard to-day from Captain Morton something that I thought would be unfavourable to the success of my suit, I hurried out here at once, to communicate the tidings to Miss Ethel Courtenay. That is the simple truth about the whole of this affair. I was foolish and precipitate, no doubt, and should have kept what I had to say till the morning; but that is all the harm that has been done, and if you will pardon my imprudence, and consent to bestow your daughter upon me, neither she nor you shall have cause to repent this night’s adventure.”

He spoke easily and cheerfully, for he fancied in that way he would best silence the outburst of wrath that he saw was gathering in Mr. Courtenay’s mind against them.

When they reached the door, and were about to enter, one of the footmen approached, and asked whether he should take the dog back to the stable, all the while looking curiously at the stranger.

“ Mind your own business, sir,” said Mr.

Courtenay, savagely, "and don't show yourself upstairs till you are sent for. That fellow," he added, turning to his sister, "came up on purpose to see if we had found out anything more, and now he'll have it all over the place tomorrow that my daughter was out at this hour with this man."

Whilst he spoke thus with his sister, Mount-eagle got beside Ethel, and managed to whisper,

"Courage, darling; all this will be well yet. I think we shall be able to come to terms with him—I begin to see my way. Do you bear up, and don't let them torment your life out, if you are not allowed to see me; and if it is not all settled at once, it will be right before long."

They were entering the drawing-room as he spoke, and she looked up in his face for one brief moment with a wonderful depth of feeling in her beautiful eyes. They were dimmed a little by weeping, and tears still clung to her long lashes, but he thought she looked more beautiful than ever, and was almost inclined to rejoice at the mishap that had probably accomplished more for him than years of waiting would have done.

Mr. Courtenay sat down in a large arm-chair on one side of the fireplace; Miss Courtenay took a seat opposite to him, while the two culprits remained standing side by side before them for a minute. Only for a minute, however; then Mounteagle stepped to the table, took a chair, and placed it for Ethel almost in front of the fire, and between her father and aunt, remaining himself standing beside it. She sank into the seat gladly, she was nearly exhausted by fatigue and strong emotion, and was touched by her lover's thoughtfulness and solicitude; so that even had she wished to stand, she would have accepted it to please him. Miss Courtenay grunted at this, her father frowned, and she looked up in Mounteagle's face, with a look that told her love and confidence as plainly as they could have been uttered in words.

"Caroline, tell me how it was you found this out," asked Mr. Courtenay, after a pause, and in a hard, dry voice, that showed Ethel she had little to expect from her father's mercy.

"I was going round, looking at all the doors and windows, as I always do," began the old lady; "and when I came to the little side door, I saw the key was out of it, and of course

imagined it was locked. I was passing it by, when I thought I would try it. On putting my hand to the lock, and finding it open, you may imagine my astonishment; but as the key was not there, I concluded Ethel had taken it upstairs, supposing the door was fastened for the night. I went up to her room and knocked, got no answer, and finally went in, to find the room empty. I looked all about the house before I came and gave you the alarm; and then, as you know, we looked through every room, and searched everywhere, before you went out to seek for her about the place. You hadn't been long gone when she came running in alone, saying she had gone out for her headache, and you know the rest."

"I never thought a daughter of mine would have stooped to such disgraceful proceedings," began Mr. Courtenay, with icy coldness and distinctness; "and were it not that she is young, and may be reformed, I would at once disown her, and have nothing more to say to her. But as yet there is no scandal, and if we can stop James's mouth, that may be spared us. Captain Morton, as I told you just now, Caroline, proposed for her to-day, and I gave him leave to try to

gain her consent. I now insist on her giving it—that is to say, if he persists in his suit, after hearing all that passed this evening. The wedding shall take place as soon as possible, and perhaps her husband may be able to take better care of her than her father has been able to do. As for this man," he added, with a wave of his hand in the direction of Mounteagle, "I should advise him never to come into my sight again. If he causes me further annoyance or trouble, I will write to his Colonel, and see if I cannot have him removed from this place, and also find out if any notice can be taken officially of his most unjustifiable behaviour. You may go, sir," he continued, with a wave of his hand towards the door.

"I will, with pleasure," answered Mounteagle, coolly, "when I have said good-bye to my promised wife. Good-bye, darling!" he whispered, taking her in his arms before the eyes of the two indignant lookers-on. "Keep up your courage, and don't mind what I say to him." Then, turning to Mr. Courtenay, he went on— "As you have expressed a wish not to see me again, I will promise you you shall not, until you ask for me. The time is not far distant

when you will be more anxious to bring me back than you now are to get me out."

He then left the room, with a farewell look at Ethel, who sat with drooping head and down-cast eyes, the very picture of misery, not daring to glance at the stern-faced judges before her.

Instead of going away by the little side-door, as Mr. Courtenay doubtless had intended he should, Mounteagle walked straight to the hall-door, and there fumbled with the key and bolts, and rattled the chain, till the butler came up to see what was the matter. He let the visitor out, but of course, on going back to supper in the servants' hall, he announced that James had been right in what he affirmed, and that it was Mr. Mounteagle who had been out with Miss Ethel in the grounds. The matter was very fully discussed by every servant in the house, as Mounteagle had intended it should be. He saw clearly it was war to the knife between him and Mr. Courtenay, and he knew that he must not scruple about the means he used, if he intended ever to win Ethel for his wife.

When the door closed behind him, a perfect storm of threats and vituperation burst upon the girl, who remained sitting where he had

left her, with her head drooping in a despondent attitude, and her hands lying loose and nerveless in her lap. Never before had Ethel Courtenay's figure expressed grief, and a feeling closely approaching despair, as it did at this minute, when the storm of words raged in her ears, fortunately for her conveying very little meaning to her mind. She had a vague idea that her aunt was exclaiming in her shrillest treble, "I told you how it would be!—I always knew this would be the end of so much over-indulgence!" while her father's harsh, stern voice broke in at intervals with, "I'd disown her this minute, only then that fellow would marry her on the spot! My daughter—the heiress of the Broadmere and Park estates—to marry a fellow without an acre to his back! Never! They need not think to bring me round to allowing such a *mésalliance*. That a daughter of mine should have caused this scandal! I could not believe it if I had not seen it." Here he paused and glared at her, while her aunt, covering her face with her handkerchief, gave way to a few hysterical sobs. After looking at her steadily for a few minutes, Mr. Courtenay continued—"Remember well what I am about to say. If

ever you marry this man, you are no daughter of mine—I disown and cast you off—money of mine you shall never touch. Let that be well understood, and then see how much longer his anxiety to have you will last. As for Captain Morton, if he still wishes for you, I desire you to accept him; in that case your present misconduct will be passed over by me, and you shall be my heiress, as I had originally intended. Don't forget this. You will perhaps see Captain Morton to-morrow; you know what answer to give him. Now go to your room. I shall take care that no more such performances on your part shall be possible."

Mechanically Ethel rose to obey, but the effort roused her spirit that the shock had for a while crushed, and turning, she confronted her father with an eye as stern and steady as his own.

"I call God to witness," she said, "that I will not disgrace myself, nor wrong Captain Morton, by marrying him when I love another man. If you will not let us marry, I know it is in your power at present to prevent it, but in time to come it will not be so, and then, if he still wishes it, I swear that I will take him, and

neither you nor any other man shall alter my resolution." Then, without casting a glance at her aunt, who was still feebly scolding, she went to her room, followed by Mr. Courtenay, who, as soon as she entered, approached with the intention of locking the door; but his last words had revealed his intention to her; she had taken the key inside, and he could hear it turned in the lock whilst he was looking for it outside. Baffled thus, he returned to the drawing-room, where a scene of violent recrimination commenced between brother and sister, Mr. Courtenay attributed all this to his sister's injudicious severity, and again expressed his determination to disinherit his daughter, if she disobeyed him. Miss Courtenay, on the other hand, said, with certainly more truth on her side, that the father's over-indulgence was to blame in the matter, and that, if she had been allowed to bring up the girl according to her views, things would have been very different.

At length when a quarrel seemed imminent, and both parties had worked themselves up into a state of exasperation, the lady suddenly remembered that it would not be at all desirable she should fight with her brother; it would

strongly resemble the somewhat suicidal act sometimes talked of—quarrelling with one's bread-and-butter. She took her candle, therefore, with great dignity, and walked off, to beguile a good part of the night in reflections on the exceeding degeneracy of girls in the present day, and solacing herself under this grievous scandal by remembering that they didn't do such things in her time.

Mr. Courtenay was perhaps as much annoyed as anyone, but it was not in his nature to let such a thing dwell on his mind and disturb him. It was a dreadful piece of business, and had enraged him beyond measure, when he first discovered it; but he had done what he could, and had made up his mind that the match, if carried out, was an offence against himself he would never forgive. He had told his daughter what would be the consequence of her persisting in her plan, and he did not in the least intend that it should come between him and his rest. Notwithstanding which resolution, and his strong will, it did, thereby irritating him still more against the delinquents.

Ethel, when she had escaped from the war of tongues down below, sat quietly down by

the fire in her own room, and began to comfort herself a little, saying that now at any rate the worst was over. She had heard all they had to say; it was very improbable Captain Morton would ask to see her when he heard all her father had to tell him next day; and she might hope that at least in two or three years' time her father, tired of opposing her, would come round to her wishes. The worst thing now she had time to think about the whole business, was the scandal of her having been caught out with this man. To be sure, if she married him, nothing more would be thought of it, but if her father would not allow that, and if by the time she was of age he had changed his mind, how would it be then? The thought frightened her, and, added to the love she really felt for him, inspired an intense desire to prevent such a contingency, and made her determine that she would persuade him to elope with her, if the marriage could not be managed openly. She had her doubts as to whether he would be willing to do so, but her task must be to make him both willing and eager; she thought she had the power in herself to draw him on to that point, but to bring her power to bear she must devise

some way of communicating with him. That could be managed, she believed, as she lay awake, passing all possible means in review before her mind, and at length arranging one that promised to do.

If she had known her lover's thoughts as he walked home, she would have seen she had no cause to feel so anxious. He had arrived at the conclusion that the affair, though disagreeable, was fortunate; he was sure Morton would not continue his pursuit of a girl whom he knew to be engaged to another, and of whom such a story was afloat as would be spread about her. If he got her it would not matter to him, but to the other man it would be different. A few days now must settle everything, and he thought he should soon have the whip-hand of Mr. Courtenay. Gossip can be made useful, he reflected, if one is not over-scrupulous about the way one uses it, and the feelings of the people concerned. Of course the plan he had devised might pain Ethel at first, before she understood his conduct; but when he explained the meaning of his actions, no doubt she would acquiesce willingly, in what she must see would greatly facilitate the realisation of her wishes. It

was a matter of much more importance to her than to him that all this should be settled—a fact she no doubt comprehended as clearly as he did, so he felt himself quite justified in adopting any measures that promised success.

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN MORTON was rather late at his breakfast next morning ; he had not slept all night, and his mind had been racked by torturing hopes and fears ; at parade several people remarked that he looked ill, a most unusual result of the good news he had heard yesterday, his comrades thought. After parade he went up to breakfast in his own room, but nothing on the table could tempt him in his present state of mind ; he ate something hurriedly, forcing himself to do so, because he would not give in to the feeling of hopelessness and discouragement that was gaining ground on him ; but each mouthful seemed as though it would choke him, and rising hastily he resolved to set out on his walk to the Park, determined not to go in till after he had seen Mounteagle call. Just then his servant brought him a note ;

it was in Mr. Courtenay's handwriting. He tore it open, and found it contained a few words, asking him to come over at once.

"Can Mounteagle have been there already?" mused Morton; "hardly, it is not eleven yet; however, I will go now," and taking up his stick, Morton went out.

There was a kind of solemnity about the manner of the servant who let him in, that caused Morton to think something must have happened; at any rate he would soon know what was the matter, he reflected, as he followed the man to the library. It was strange that he saw Ethel nowhere, nor heard her voice ringing through the house in snatches of merry songs, as he often heard it; but then she might be out riding—that would be rather annoying, in case he wanted to speak to her; but that possibility was hardly to be contemplated. Over by the fire sat Mr. Courtenay; he was turning over papers hurriedly, and seemed busy, but the instant Morton entered he pushed them to one side, motioned his visitor to a comfortable chair, and going to the door which the servant had first closed, locked it. What can all these precautions mean, thought Morton, beginning to

notice his host's troubled restless air. He had not much time to think over the matter, however, for after poking the fire nervously, and making a few purposeless remarks about the weather, Mr. Courtenay began.

"I was right after all in what I told you yesterday. That young miscreant Mounteagle has had the audacity to tell my daughter he loves her, and she, I regret to say, has been so lost to all sense of her duty as my daughter, and proper regard for her position, that she has engaged herself to him."

"I know all this," said Morton sadly, "he told me it yesterday evening; has he been with you this morning?"

"No, sir," answered Courtenay, speaking with unintentional sternness, "this is the shameful part of the story; but I must tell it to you, that you may judge whether it will produce any alteration in your wishes." He then related the scene of the evening before, stating also his own intention of absolutely prohibiting the marriage. "I know it must make a great difference to your feelings," he concluded; "and that I could hardly expect you should wish for a wife a woman who had so far for-

gotten what was due to herself and her position ; but if you should still desire to marry her, you know now all that is to be said against her ; and I think I can make her obey me in this, though no doubt it will be a difficult task."

Captain Morton, during this explanation, had been sitting resting his face on one hand, thereby hiding the expression of his countenance, so that Mr. Courtenay was quite in the dark as to what were his feelings on the subject. He did not answer at once when his host ceased speaking—he was struggling with the temptation held out to him, trying to decide which was really the right course to pursue, and wondering whether he should have strength to give her up, if it should seem to him that was what he ought to do. He knew, or at least he told himself, she would be much happier with him than she could ever hope to be with this man, who had already led her into harm's way ; but would she ever think so ?—was it possible he could ever teach her to love him, and forget his rival ? If he could hope for that, then nothing that had as yet happened should come between them ; but if she only took him in obedience to her father's command, how

could he form any idea as to whether he would ever be able to win her over? Something seemed to tell him he would not be right to accept the help of her father's influence, that he would do better to speak to her himself, and judge from her manner what chance he had of success. He looked up at last, and his face was worn and haggard as he raised it to answer Mr. Courtenay.

“I will see her,” he said, “if you will allow me; but I had rather you did not exert your authority over her to make her accept me. It she takes me at all, she will take me of her own free will; but don't think what happened last night makes any difference to me. From what passed between myself and Mounteagle beforehand, I know their story is a true one, and she has been foolish and imprudent only.”

“Very well, you shall see her,” answered Mr. Courtenay; “but mind, you cannot expect to win her all at once; and I shall never give my consent to the other, so you may as well make use of any help I can give you.”

Morton shook his head, and followed his host to the drawing-room, which was silent and deserted.

"Wait here," said the elder gentleman; "I will send her to you at once."

Ethel was in her room, going over again in her mind the plan she had formed last night for communicating with her lover—she was waiting to put it into execution, until she should hear whether Captain Morton had called, and what he said on hearing what her father had to tell him. A knock was heard at the door, and on her answering, her maid appeared with the message that Mr. Courtenay desired she should go down to the drawing-room.

Steeling herself for the stormy interview she expected with her father, she went down slowly, hard and cold as iron. She opened the door and entered, expecting to meet her father's stern cold face, instead of which she saw no one in the room but Captain Morton, who came towards her and took her hand, with the old reverential tender expression she knew so well. But for all that, though he looked at her as he used to look in the days when he fancied she loved him, and no foolish act of hers had betrayed her into trouble, still his face was pained and aged, and there was a nervous restlessness about him that told her he knew all. He led

her to a seat, and then began the monotonous walk up and down the room that he always resorted to in moments of great mental agitation. He did not speak, and she sat silent for a few minutes ; then her spirit rose at what she considered his forgetfulness of her, and she said,

“ What do you want with me, Captain Morton ? I think, as you have sent for me, the least you can do is to tell me your business quickly, and let me go. If you think that because of last night you need no longer treat me with respect and consideration, you are greatly mistaken.”

She would have gone on, and said more bitter and cruel words, but he stopped before her, laying his hand on her arm, and saying,

“ For God’s sake don’t speak like that !—last night makes so little difference to me, that I ask you now to be my wife with just as much respect and love for you as I had before I knew what had occurred.”

“ You ask me this,” she replied, looking straight at him with angry eyes, “ knowing that I love another man, and that man one of your comrades. You may call it love, and try to excuse yourself on that plea ; I call it treachery to him, and disparaging to me. Don’t

let me hear any more of it. My father might have spared me this, if he would have taken my word when I told him I would marry none but the man I love."

"Don't speak so hardly to me," said Morton, passing his hand over his face, and turning away his head, that he might not betray the anguish he was suffering. "If it is as you say, I was wrong to think I might move you from that resolve; but when you love as I do, you will know how hard it is to take the decision of one's fate from the lips of one who has no interest in the matter. I wish I could dare to speak to you as I feel, but I cannot. I dread exciting your anger; why did you draw me on, and flatter me with hopes that you never had any intention of realizing? It was cruel, and you must have seen the mischief you were doing."

"I was wrong," she answered, "but I didn't understand then what the pain I was causing could be. Forgive me."

"I will forgive you," he answered; "I have strength to promise that. Perhaps you will find it harder to forgive yourself, now you know what the pain can be that you have caused me."

He turned and left the room as he spoke, in-

tending to leave without seeing Mr. Courtenay, but that gentleman was waiting for him, and met him in the hall.

“What! are you going?” he said. “Come, man, don’t be discouraged; you couldn’t expect the girl to give you a favourable answer all at once, especially when you would not let me speak to her; wait awhile, and then come on again, and you will find her all right.”

Morton shook his head sadly.

“I am afraid not,” he answered; “but I will talk to you more about it another day—at present I cannot.”

No sooner had he left than Mr. Courtenay, unmindful in his eagerness of what he had promised Morton, sent for his daughter, and on her appearance repeated his warning that she would get nothing from him, if she did not consent to take the man he chose.

“I have told you I will not do that,” she answered.

In the meanwhile gossip had not been idle. All day strange reports had been going the round of the lower regions, carried by Mr. Price into the garden, and by Robert to the stable, and passing thence in fifty magnified editions

through every house and farm near. The town caught up the rumours quickly, and late that evening Slingsby met someone, who questioned him as to the truth of one of them, which reported that "coming home late yesterday evening, Mr. Billings the butler, had surprised Miss Courtenay out walking with Mr. Mounteagle, who had his arm round her waist. That Mr. Billings, shocked and outraged at such a discovery, had confronted them, saying, "Miss Ethel, you had better return to the house. I shall consider it my duty to bring this gentleman before your papa."

On this he was represented as having collared Mounteagle, and brought him before Mr. Courtenay, who then and there horsewhipped him and kicked him out of the house ; and they say, continued Slingsby's informant, that Captain Morton went over to the Park to-day, acting as Mounteagle's friend, and taking a challenge from him to the young lady's father."

" What absurd nonsense !" laughed Slingsby ; " that is really too good. That Morton was over there to-day I know, but I happen also to know that he went there at Mr. Courtenay's special request : and more, I don't believe one word of

that cock-and-bull story about the butler; even supposing Mounteagle had been caught in the situation described, which I don't think likely. Do you believe he is the sort of fellow to allow Billings or any other servant to drag him anywhere he didn't choose to go, or to allow any man at all to horsewhip him? Why, he would be more than a match for Courtenay and his servant together."

"Well, that's only one of the stories going about town on the subject, so take my word for it, Mounteagle's been up to something."

"I wonder how much truth there is in all that nonsense?" mused Slingsby, when his friend left. "I'll go in and ask Mounteagle about it. I know he goes to the Foxes to-night, so he's about dressing now, I should say."

Acting on this idea, Slingsby presently made his appearance at his comrade's rooms.

"I say, Mount," he began, as soon as he entered, "what's this wonderful story I'm hearing about you everywhere? It's almost all untrue, I know; but as they say there's no smoke without fire, I suppose you have been doing something out of the way. Tell me what it is?"

"Briefly the matter is this: Mr. Courtenay

caught his daughter and me out together last night; he didn't horsewhip me, as you may suppose, but he interposed his parental authority to break off our engagement—as I had feared he would if he found it out, and, to prevent which discovery, I had paid such an ill-timed visit. However, I don't fret much, as I know he must give way when he sees how these reports gain ground. As to Morton's being out there to-day, which, you tell me, has been mixed up in my affair, it had nothing to do with it; he went on his own hook, to talk with old Courtenay about Ethel, on his own account. You know he's desperately hard hit, and proposed for her as soon as he had heard he had got his money. She won't have him, as she prefers me, but I think he went to-day to have one more trial, and see if he could induce her to change her mind."

"Which she would do, if she was of my opinion," laughed Slingsby. "You'll never make a good husband."

"I don't know that," answered Mounteagle, as he donned his war-paint (by which poetical name he designated his evening dress.) "I daresay I shall be as good in that line as half

the fellows one meets ; better than some, perhaps, for, if I got tired of my wife, I still don't think I should ill-treat her."

" Not physically, no doubt," returned Slingsby ; " you'd only frighten her to death ! That scowl of yours would half kill any woman who had the misfortune to be in your power ; it seems to threaten so many things. No, the girl's a fool if she don't take Morton ; and I think she must be one, or she'd never have had anything to say to you."

" You're complimentary, at any rate," answered Mounteagle, rather crossly. " It seems you're not afraid of my scowl—but I wouldn't advise you to go too far."

" Oh ! I'm a privileged person ; you'll look as if you were going to eat me, no doubt, but you'll never touch me. I don't see why old Courtenay should be so much against you, though. You're poor enough, but you can support yourself ; and he might tie up his tin as tight as he liked, if that were all, I suppose ? What do you think is his objection ?"

" I'm sure I can't say," replied Mounteagle, who was, at least, certain of one thing, which was, that Mr. Courtenay did not know the secret of his

birth ; if that, by any chance, was to come out, he felt it would be all up with him ; that even the hold he had got over Mr. Courtenay might not be sufficient, and he determined to hurry matters as soon as he should have power to do so, in order that everything might be settled before Colonel Langham should hear of it. His Colonel might put questions that would be troublesome to answer.

His dressing finished, he went off to dinner, leaving Slingsby greatly puzzled at what he had heard.

“ Just fancy that fellow going off to amuse himself now ! ” he thought. “ Any other man in his place would be down-hearted, but he seems to think it is all right, and that he is quite sure of success. Well, I never did care about that girl, and I think she proves she is what I thought her, by preferring him to Morton. After all, one can’t help pitying her, if she has the future in store for her that I suspect she will have with that fellow.”

Thus mused Slingsby, as he stood in the street watching Mounteagle drive away with a contented look on his usually gloomy face. The young man was right in thinking his comrade

felt himself sure of success ; he did so certainly, and yet at times, when the remembrance of the stain on his name awoke within him, he experienced considerable uneasiness. It was not possible that Mr. Courtenay should not require to know something more about his family than he at present knew. His position as an officer in Her Majesty's service was not in these days sufficient guarantee of his social standing, and in the event of inquiries being made, what answer could he give ?

If he referred them to his old neighbours in the town of Sloane, his cause was done for ; and if he gave false references, the fraud would be detected, and suspicion aroused. The only course he could see open to him, was the one proposed by Ethel, and which he had been unwilling to adopt—namely, elopement. That would effectually solve all difficulties, and place him beyond fear of discovery at once ; then he would sell out, and with the proceeds of the sale of his commission they could emigrate to the colonies, and begin life anew out there. A life that he thought would suit him, with its constant change of scene and occupation, for he had no idea of settling down at once to any particu-

lar employment. He thought he should like to wander about, and take a turn at everything, having always his little income to fall back upon, whenever they should be too hard up; if necessity should force him to it, he was sure to find work somewhere.

The conclusion was satisfactory, and he would have made up his mind to go and see Ethel next evening, but a kind of stubborn pride prevented him taking this resolution. He had said he would not go there again until Mr. Courtenay should send for him; he believed he would do so in a day or two, and, encouraged by this idea, he determined to wait at least two days longer before going to talk over the other plan with Ethel, or, rather, before writing anything to her about it, for talking would be dangerous, and might be overheard.

In the meantime, Slingsby had met Morton returning from his long walk, and saw at once by the wan, pained face, what his friend had been suffering.

“She was not worth it,” he thought. “Clara Singleton is the only woman I know worthy such love from a man like him. He’s tired, too, and has been walking far. I’ll speak to him.”

He did so, and was astonished at the cheerful voice and manner with which Morton answered him; it was as though, on finding he was noticed, he had thrust back pain, and weariness, and sorrow into some hidden corner of his mind, and brought out all the old gay looks and tones to greet his friend. But it was a fearful effort, as Slingsby's keen eye could tell, and affected him more than grief itself would have done. "He will be better alone than acting this part," thought the kind-hearted subaltern, and he passed on, grieved for the sorrow that he saw was so great, and that he could not in any way alleviate.

"Well, if this is the usual result of love, I think, after all, it's as well I have never had a chance of meeting Clara Singleton. Would she treat a fellow that way, I wonder? I don't think so; there is something true in the way she looks at you. By-the-by, I wonder what she will say when she hears that Mounteagle is engaged to Ethel Courtenay? I thought at one time she used to like him, and if she did, she is not a girl who will forget quickly, so there will be more sorrow. Decidedly the most heartless must be the most happy in this world!"

Full of these reflections, he went up to his rooms, and sitting down, proceeded to write a full, true, and particular account of the whole affair to Matthews, winding up by expressing his extreme anxiety to know how it would all terminate. Thus it happened that, a day or two afterwards, as Clara Singleton was sitting with a book open in her lap, and her dreamy eyes fixed upon the fire, Mr. Matthews was ushered into the room. Clara, though she had a book before her, had not been reading; she had been wondering why her last letter to Mounteagle had never been answered, and asking herself again and again whether she had been deceived in thinking he loved her. She told herself it was quite impossible she could have been so blind as to take for affection that which was only its semblance; but for all that, conviction began to steal over her that this fear had some foundation.

When Matthews entered, she rose to greet him with a degree of pleasure which she could not account for, as surely his last visit had not at all pleased her. Unknown to herself, this feeling was caused by the hope that she would hear something about Mounteagle, no matter

whether the news were bad or good. She sent word to her mother to apprise her of Mr. Matthews' arrival, and then set herself to entertain him, and listen to his small-talk as well as she could, when she was devoured with impatience to ask him one or two questions that still she could not bring herself to utter. At length, finding that her mother delayed coming to the rescue, she determined to make the effort, and asked, calm outwardly, but inwardly with a fluttering heart :

“ What news have you had from the detachment? Is there anything going on where they are quartered ? ”

Then he began to give her all his news, of course beginning with the wrong detachment ; whilst she sat, feigning to take an interest in all he said, and longing to do something that might bring him more quickly to the subject about which she was so eager to hear. She was afraid of betraying herself, however, if she dared put any leading question, so she let him ramble on from one topic to another, till at last he came of his own free will to the one in which she was interested.

“ Do you remember my telling you of the

letter I had from Slingsby a few weeks ago ?” he asked suddenly.

“ Yes,” she answered, putting her hand up to loosen the velvet round her throat, which seemed suddenly to become too tight; she felt as if she had grown pale, though she told herself, with a kind of desperate determination to believe what she said, that she had nothing to fear from his news.

“ Well, I heard again this morning. It seems they have lighted on rather good quarters there, and have been amusing themselves very much. Morton and Mounteagle both over head and ears in love with the same young lady. Morton is favoured by the papa, Mounteagle by the girl herself, and Slingsby says he is sure there will be a marriage there.”

He finished speaking, and waited for an answer. Clara neither wept nor trembled, nor showed in any way the unnatural tension of her nerves, except that she turned a shade paler than she had been before, as she answered,

“ Is that the case? What does Mr. Slingsby think of the match ?”

She had not time to realize what had happened, to feel the pain that she would have ex-

pected to feel on such a discovery; she was conscious only of a terrible overwhelming desire that her secret should not be suspected, and acting under this impulse, she smiled with what Matthews mistook for her usual merry look, as she put the question.

“He seems not to care much for the young lady, I think,” answered Matthews, “although he admits she is wonderfully beautiful. He says, also, Mounteagle has been behaving very badly to Morton, and is looked upon with distrust by everyone, though no one can help liking him while with him, he has such a wonderfully taking manner.”

Clara nearly broke down as she remembered how she had been deceived by that manner, but she knew enough of the man before her to be aware that he was a very keen observer, and would not be too scrupulous in reporting the result of his observations; she therefore forced herself to reply, in a tone that was almost too careless,

“Yes, I thought him very pleasant, the few times I met him. I did not see enough of him to discover any of his faults, you know, except his aversion to Major Campbell.”

She raised her calm grey eyes to his face as she spoke, with a tranquil assurance that deceived him. He had had his suspicions, and had come that day determined to verify them, but her acting was too good, and he went away completely deceived.

“At any rate, that girl never cared for him,” he said to himself. “I thought she could not have liked him, though several people said she did. She’s far and away too fine a character to have been easily deceived by Mounteagle’s brilliant surface. If I was a rich man, and could please myself, I don’t know anybody I’d go in for sooner than Miss Singleton; but, as it is, she’s altogether beyond my reach, and it wouldn’t pay, besides. Henry Matthews, my boy, matrimony must be a paying speculation before you venture on it.”

Thus thought Matthews after leaving the Colonel’s house, where he had not remained long after retailing his budget of news, and where, to the end of his visit, Clara had borne up bravely, and made herself more agreeable than she generally felt inclined to be to the little Lieutenant. But when he was gone, and she had escaped to her own room, when the neces-

sity for keeping up her courage and hiding her misery was over, then, for the first time, she began to realize what the intelligence she had just heard meant to her, and to feel the agony of such an awakening from the happy dreams in which, quite unwittingly, she had indulged. For she thought she had mistrusted this man, and, doing so, had fought against her growing love for him ; she thought she had been stronger than that love, that her will had triumphed over it, and kept it down ; she had often imagined what her feelings would be if she should one day discover she had been deceived ; and she always told herself she was so much mistress of her own heart she should not suffer greatly in the discovery.

Now the day she had thought must come had come, but she failed entirely when she tried to meet it as she had fancied she could do. Oh ! the misery, the humiliation of knowing he had been amusing himself at the expense of all that was best and truest in her nature ! How he must have read her through and through, and laughed at what he read ; at her belief in him, her admiration for what she believed good and noble in him ; her little en-

thusiasm for the true and beautiful, her heart-felt contempt for the base and mean.

Yes, he knowing himself, and knowing that the part he was acting, and which so deluded her, was the very thing she would have condemned, had she understood it—all this must have furnished him with cause for merriment and mockery. She writhed under the idea, and then wondered whether the man who had told her all this suspected anything; whether she had succeeded in blinding him as to her feelings. In such a deception her woman's instinct assured her there was no harm. She had been wounded in the deepest and holiest feelings of her nature, it was due both to her self-respect and to her sex that none should discover her secret, or point a scornful jest at her. She felt she had and would have strength for this. There was no weakness about Clara Singleton that would permit her to expose her trouble, even to her nearest and dearest friends; she could wear a mask even with them—she would do so. Her joy had been hers alone, when she thought herself beloved, her sorrow would be even more dumb and voiceless. Joy it might

be possible to share—grief must be one's own for ever!"

So thought Clara, with her proud and reserved disposition, that shuddered at the mere thought of another's seeing and pitying the wrong she had endured, the pain she was suffering. "He shall not know himself when he meets me again," she muttered, while she pressed her cold hands on her burning eyelids, from which no tear fell, to relieve the weight that seemed pressing on her brain. She was one of those natures to whom tears in great trouble are denied, and who suffer infinitely more at such times than their weaker fellows, whose weeping dulls the power of feeling in the overwrought brain.

But the humiliation and the fear of discovery were not the worst of the pain she suffered. What grieved her most was that he was not such as she had believed him to be. The disappointment it was to find that where she had believed him noble he was mean, where she had thought him true he was false—there was the sting! She had made him a hero, not a faultless one after the manner of a foolish girl, but a hero all the same, with a character full of defects

and faults, no doubt, but the defects in which were venial, the faults acknowledged and overcome, or, at least, to overcome which efforts were made. And now to find that he had been none of these things, a man only a little worse than his fellows, that she had given all the love and worship of her nature to such a one, was indeed bitter. Though she tried still to deceive herself and excuse him, though she told herself she could not judge him, not knowing his trials and temptations, yet she knew that in the main she must be right—he could never have been the character she had dreamed him.

For his own sake she grieved most; for, not being what she had thought him, and being what she now knew him, she could not but look forward to his future life with feelings of apprehension. Others would find him out as she had done, for a man who could so act in one situation, would act in a similar manner in others, when it should be convenient to him so to do; and popular though he now was, such popularity could not continue, if once his hollowness was discovered.

Over all these things her mind ranged, as she

sat pressing her cold white fingers to her burning forehead, and rocking herself to and fro on her chair in her misery. Suddenly she heard her mother's step approaching her door, and with an instinct that prompted concealment before everything, she smoothed her ruffled hair, and turned to meet Mrs. Singleton as she entered, with her old bright smile, in which the mother's eye failed to detect the forced merriment.

She had a hard part to play that evening. She knew she must tell the news she had that day heard; if she failed to do so, it would be sure to leak out somehow, and then the best acting of which she was capable would be powerless to hide her secret, when once suspicion was aroused. Again and again she determined to bring it all out, and again and again as she tried to speak her voice failed her, but she did it at last, bravely, unflinchingly; and afterwards listened to her uncle's jokes about the unnecessary consideration she had wished to show for his feelings, joining in the laugh raised at her expense, with a heart that ached while she laughed, and brilliant star-like eyes, that owed their lustre to the unshed tears that lay behind them.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE were a knot of men in the ante-room when Captain Morton entered it about mid-day, the morning after the events related in the last chapter. There were visitors from the town calling on the detachment, and Slingsby, Attwood, and one or two others, were there entertaining them. They were all talking busily when Morton entered, but ceased, and a constrained silence fell on the company, when they noticed him. Morton perceived this, but said, carelessly,

“What were you all talking about?—you don’t seem inclined to go on now, and yet you were very busy a minute or two ago.”

He had some kind of an idea what the subject of their conversation was, and wished to brazen out the matter in this way.

The men looked at one another anxiously.

Then one of the townsmen, a Mr. Owens, answered,

“ We were talking of the queer stories going about your subaltern, Mounteagle, and Miss Courtenay.”

“ Ah !” said the Captain, calmly, though a slight frown contracted his brow. “ Would you mind telling me what they are ?”

“ Well, you see, you’re supposed to be for something in the affair too,” replied Owens. “ But if you don’t mind hearing what’s said, and won’t suspect me as the author of any of the stories—for indeed I only tell you what I heard—I don’t mind repeating them ; and as you are at the Park oftener than anybody, I daresay you could tell us the truth.”

“ I can do that,” said Slingsby. “ I heard it from Mount. I was going to have told you when Morton came in.”

“ Let’s hear the stories first, Slingsby. I am curious to see what the Merritonites have made out of the matter.”

Thus spoke the Captain, turning to the window and looking out, while Owens repeated a string of fabrications, one more odious than the other, and of which the one Slingsby had first

heard was decidedly the least objectionable. When he had finished, Morton turned round with a look on his calm face, white under its deeply-tanned bronze, that none of his comrades had seen on it before.

“The story is hardly recognisable under its present forms,” he said, quietly moving towards the door; “but if I had the inventor of them within arm’s length, I’d see whether a good stout cutting whip wouldn’t correct his memory. Slingsby, you had better tell the true version, to clear away a little of this abominable scandal.”

As he spoke he went out, not waiting to hear what Slingsby had to say.

That day had not passed when, in some round-about manner, the gossip reached Miss Courtenay’s ears. She went at once to communicate it to her brother, and to impress on him that, if her advice had been followed, this would not have happened. Between them it was decided that, the business having excited so much talk, it would be better Ethel should be permitted to marry Mounteagle; Mr. Courtenay insisting, however, that beyond an allowance barely sufficient to support her, and which

should be settled strictly on herself, his daughter should not get a penny; and to a man of his nature, even the concession he made was very great and distasteful.

“When is it to be, Mount?” asked five or six eager voices around the table, as Mount-eagle, after receiving Mr. Courtenay’s note, announced his approaching marriage.

“I don’t know,” answered Mount-eagle, slowly and lazily; “the old beggar wants to give his daughter no fortune, and he must know a poor devil like me can’t marry without I get something with my wife. I’m a disinterested man enough, I think, but not quite so disinterested as that, when I know the money’s there. However, we’ve settled to wait till the old fellow gets reasonable, which I daresay he will before long; and when he gives in, we’ll be married at once.”

“You’ll ask us all to the breakfast, of course, Mount?” asked Slingsby.

“I’m not sure of that—I’d have to ask the whole regiment then, and the bride mightn’t like it.”

So saying, and dinner being over, Mount-eagle got up and left the room. He had not

quite made up his mind whether he should go and see Ethel outside her window that evening, or whether he should go down to the billiard-room in town, and have a game. There was a very good player to be in there that evening, and Mounteagle liked a good game. He had nothing new to tell Ethel, he was quite sure of her, and he was very sure also that standing out in damp grass on a chilly autumnal night, straining his neck looking up at a window, would not be as comfortable as the cigars and light and fire of the billiard-room, even though the window was occupied by the lady of his choice gazing down into the darkness at him, and straining her voice that he might hear her words before the wind could catch them and blow them to pieces. A cold in the head and red eyes would be the result of such an interview to her; a crick in the neck and an attack of rheumatism the probable effect on him; so after a short consideration of the matter, he decided for billiards, and turned his steps in the direction of the town, quite indifferent to the misery and uncertainty that Ethel, sitting up in her lonely room, was suffering on his account, and which his momentary appearance under

her window would have sufficed to dispel.

Again and again that evening, as she sat alone in the darkness, she blamed herself for her folly in ever having cared for this man, or believed his fond, deluding words. She cried a good deal over it, and told herself she was very miserable, that she never could—no, never, as long as she lived, care for another man as she cared for him; and then she dried her eyes, seeing it was quite hopeless to expect him so late, and sat down before her fire with an exciting novel, which brought her into a very equable frame of mind before she retired to rest. Patient bearing up under her trials she considered it, and prided herself on her fortitude. Really she was rather unhappy—she had it not in her nature to suffer very intensely on any subject—she felt more on this than on any other, and was rather surprised at herself that she could so feel, and thought that her sufferings and misery were unheard of, because she had never experienced anything like them before; any sorrow not as easily soothed as hers, she would have regarded as affected and overdone.

By the time she had finished the second

volume of her novel, she began to feel the world was not so used up as she had thought it awhile ago, when watching at the window. Of course she could not love ever again—her power of feeling such an emotion had been exhausted in this one first and last passion ; but there were many other things that would make life endurable she could see now, and if she could only overcome the terrible forlornness that her lover's conduct filled her with, she might get on comfortably enough. If she could have seen Mounteagle at that minute, absorbed in consideration of a difficult cannon off the cushion, she might not perhaps have felt quite so contented ; for though she tried to make herself believe that he had given her up, she liked to fancy the giving up had cost him some little pain, and that at any rate he was moping at home, though he couldn't come out to her. Whereas the real facts of the case were that he liked her as well as ever, only, now he was sure of her, it was not worth his while to inconvenience himself by standing outside her window in the cold, when some better amusement presented itself, and when he knew he should have as much of her society as he cared for shortly.

Next morning, when post came in, Mounteagle received a letter in a handwriting that seemed familiar to him, but which he could not quite remember, so as to tell at once from whom it came. He turned it over, and looked at the post-mark, "Aldershot." That didn't tell him much ; he had lots of acquaintances at Aldershot, none of whom he should have thought would have troubled themselves to write to him. It was no good wasting time looking at the outside, so he opened it.

"Colonel Langham, by Jove !" he exclaimed, looking at the signature. "In the name of all that's wonderful, what does he want with me ?"

The note was short, and ran as follows :—

"DEAR MOUNTEAGLE,

"I have just been told that you are thinking of marrying the daughter of Mr. Courtenay, of Broadmere, Blankshire, and the Park, Merriton. If this be true, and you are the successful man, allow me to offer my best wishes for your happiness and prosperity ; but as your old friend, and one who takes a deep interest in you, for the sake of your family, as well as for your own, let me remind you that Mr. Courtenay

ought to be made acquainted with all the circumstances of your history. If his daughter's happiness is much involved in your marriage, he will not allow a knowledge of it to come between you, and it will be the only honourable course you can possibly pursue in the matter. Doubtless, if report is true as to how you stand with Miss Courtenay, you have already done what I advise; but for fear you might put it off till too late, or in any way allow yourself to be blinded to the necessity of acting as I recommend, I have written this, being the only person aware of your circumstances, who can remind you of your duty in this respect. Forgive your old friend, if he has trespassed too much on your forbearance. My sister and niece desire to be kindly remembered to you, and wish you every happiness.

“Your sincere friend,

“WILLIAM LANGHAM.”

“This is a pretty piece of business!” muttered Mounteagle, as he finished reading it. “What a fool the old duffer must be, if he thinks I am going to tell old Courtenay that story! Bad as matters are, it would be all up with me then. And now, I should like to know what I shall

write to him, as, of course, he'll expect an answer, or he'll fire another letter at me, and perhaps write to Mr. Courtenay. I have to go out there to-day, too, so I'll just send the Colonel a line that will settle his business first."

Sitting down with a determined air, that showed he had already made up his mind what course to pursue, Mounteagle wrote as follows :

“ DEAR COLONEL LANGHAM,

“ Many thanks for your kind letter, and for the great interest which it shows you take in me. I have indeed been fortunate enough to succeed in winning the young lady to whom you allude. You may be quite satisfied that I have told Mr. Courtenay everything that he should know concerning my early life and history. There have been some unfortunate circumstances connected with my intimacy with the Courtenays, which, when I relate them to you, will fully explain Mr. Courtenay's making no objection to the marriage. Remember me to the ladies, and thank them for their kind wishes, which bid fair to be fulfilled.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ HERBERT MUNTEAGLE.”

"That will quiet him, I think," he muttered, folding his letter; "and after all, it's strictly true, as I don't consider there is any reason he should know more about me than he does at present. Now, what shall I do with this old fellow to-day, if he asks me about my family? After all, as he has to give her to me, he is not likely to trouble himself about inquiries, unless he knows anyone that ever lived near Sloane. I must find that out first, but it's not likely."

Thus thinking, he posted his letter, and set out on his way to the Park. The butler, who admitted him, looked curiously at him as he led the way to the library; and if he had thought he could have heard anything of what went on inside, would doubtless have remained to listen at the door, but he knew there was no chance of that, the door closed too well, and the distance that the gentlemen sat from it precluded all hope of successful eavesdropping. All the servants in the house had by this time discovered something was going to happen. Since the affair a few nights ago, everyone was on the *qui vive*. Captain Morton's visits had been commented on, and as the state of that officer's

feelings was pretty well known, much curiosity was excited by his continuing his attentions, after the scandal the other night. The maids all protested he was a great deal too good for her, though they also asserted that Mr. Mounteagle was better still, and they couldn't think what such a fine, dashing young man as he was could see in a little bit of a pert piece like Miss Ethel. In this opinion the men did not quite agree, but they were all unanimous on one point: one of these two gentlemen Miss Ethel was bound to marry, and it behoved them to be civil to both, with a view to prospective tips and wedding presents.

"I have called, as you expressed in your note a wish to see me," began Mounteagle, bowing stiffly to Mr. Courtenay, who had risen, and was standing before his visitor, without asking him to sit down. "I wish you to understand," he went on, "that unless you had made such a request, I should never have come inside your doors again."

"I understand all that," answered Mr. Courtenay, haughtily; "to be frank with you, I should much have preferred it if you never had. Not to waste time in explanations of this sort,

we had better go to business at once. You want to marry my daughter, and I don't wish you to do so at all ; but unfortunately, you have been the cause of getting her talked about, in a way very hurtful to my feelings and prejudicial to herself. It is therefore expedient that I should give way in this matter, and consent to the marriage. I do so from necessity, not from choice ; and as I understand that you will take my daughter, with or without money, whichever way you can get her——”

“ Pardon me,” interrupted Mounteagle, “ there was a time when I would have done so ; now it is different—she must have a fortune adequate to support her in the ease and luxury to which she has been accustomed.”

Mr. Courtenay drew back, straightened his stiff figure into a still more erect attitude, and touched the bell near which he stood ; he rang twice, evidently in a peculiar manner, and then, turning to his visitor said,

“ It seems I have been misinformed about your intentions ; expecting, however, that we might need my daughter's presence to-day, I desired her maid to tell her to come to me here

as soon as she should hear my bell rung twice.
She will be with us immediately."

Mounteagle felt a little uncomfortable. It was quite one thing saying to Mr. Courtenay alone, that he would not take his daughter without his money, and a very different thing to repeat the same before the girl he believed he loved, and that he was quite sure loved him. He knew he should come out conqueror in the battle, however, and he was not inclined to forego so substantial a triumph in order to spare her a few tears, easily to be wiped away after the victory was gained.

They waited in solemn silence. Suddenly a thought struck Mounteagle.

"Are you acquainted with the neighbourhood of Sloane, in the west of Ireland, Mr. Courtenay?"

"I am not, Mr. Mounteagle," answered the elder man stiffly; "and I am at a loss to understand what bearing that question has on our present business."

"Only that that is my native place, and where I passed my early youth," replied Mounteagle, rather amused at the marked manner in which his future father-in-law had pointed out

to him that he would hold no communication with him that was not strictly necessary. "Charming spot!" he went on, with the deliberate intention of annoying the old man; "the scenery is well worth seeing, and the people very agreeable. If you ever do visit Ireland you ought to travel in that direction. I am sure you would be pleased with it."

Mr. Courtenay bowed stiffly without speaking, and Mounteagle was just about to begin again, when the door opened and Ethel entered the room. She was beautifully dressed in black velvet, and her lover thought he had never seen her look half so charming. There was a softness to-day about the expression of her face that was usually wanting to it, and her strange golden eyes met his with a timid, reproachful look, as she stood in frightened silence a little inside the door. She was horribly afraid of her father—afraid, not of his violence, but of his cold, icy manner, that cut deeper, wounded more sorely, than any frantic raging or passion could have done.

Mounteagle noticed her fear, and saw, too, what caused it. It gave him a clue as to the way in which he could best annoy her father;

going up to her where she stood at the far end of the room, he folded her in his arms, saying,

“What’s the matter with you, little one? Have they been ill-treating you?”

She glanced at her father, who had approached them, with a terrified look, and when he took her by the arm and led her to the other end of the room she followed him passively, as though she had not strength to resist.

“Before you permit the caresses of that man, Miss Ethel Courtenay,” said her father, in a tone of icy coldness, “it would be as well that you should know he has just declared that he will not marry you unless I give him a fortune with you. So much for his disinterested affection! He thinks that through him your name has been so compromised, that you will have no chance of marrying unless you take him, and he is resolved to drive a hard bargain. But he is not aware of one fact, that may alter his whole scheme: Captain Morton, a good and honourable man, is willing to marry you at once if you will have him, either with or without fortune, as may suit my wishes and convenience. Now that you know the character of the man to

whom you so imprudently trusted yourself; I hope your good sense will prevail, and that I shall hear no more of your desire to marry him."

During this speech Ethel had stood with her eyes fixed upon her father's, as though fascinated by his cold angry glance; as he finished she turned timidly to her lover, who had again approached them, and asked in a low trembling voice,

"Is this true, what my father tells me?"

"It is true," he answered, taking her hand and gazing into her tearful upturned eyes; "true that I am determined not to drag you down into poverty to which you are unaccustomed, when I know your father can give you a fortune that would raise you above any such necessity, and that his giving you that fortune would in no way encumber or inconvenience him. Much as I love you, I should not be justified in forgetting your interests in my own selfish happiness. Do you understand me, darling?"

"I understand only one thing," she said, drawing closer to him, "and that is, that you do not care for me as I do for you, or you would

never talk in that calm way about letting money make a barrier between us. Don't you see," she whispered, "that if you don't take me, I shall be forced to marry Captain Morton; save me from that fate, and I shall never repine at the loss of luxuries or fortune."

"Can you make up your mind to go with me to the other end of the world, to follow me through hardships and adversity?" he asked.

"I can," she answered; "anywhere will be home to me if you are there, and I'll try not to mind even if we are badly off." She felt as she spoke then, that all that was best in her nature was worked up to its highest pitch, and she thought she could have dared and sacrificed everything for this man, who she was afraid was slipping away from her.

"Your daughter still prefers me, with all my faults, to your irreproachable friend Captain Morton," sneered Mounteagle, turning to Mr. Courtenay; "and we have agreed to go out to Australia immediately after our marriage; but as it is even more necessary there to have a little capital to start with than it is here, I must again demand that you shall make some settlement on your daughter, sufficient to keep her

from want if anything happens to me, or if my endeavours to increase my small means are not successful."

"In order that you may live quietly and comfortably on my daughter's money—I understand," answered Mr. Courtenay; "a pleasant arrangement for you, sir, and one which I should positively refuse to make, were I not certain you would probably abandon her, and leave her to starve in a foreign land, if it were not made worth your while to remain with her."

"Just so," said Mounteagle calmly, though his eyes flashed, and the hand that held Ethel's tightened its grasp on her slightly; "for that consideration, if for nothing else, you had better do as I ask; if not, I have no further business here, and shall trouble you no longer."

Mr. Courtenay turned away and began pacing up and down the room in great agitation; it was almost impossible to his stern, implacable spirit to give in; and yet as soon as he saw Mounteagle was not particularly anxious for the marriage, he began to be extremely desirous of it, for his daughter's sake. It was the only feasible way out of the scrape into which her imprudence had brought her, and, moreover, the

only measure she would consent to take, to put a stop to the gossip consequent on her error. As he turned from them, Ethel clung to Mounteagle, and entreated him, with tears in her eyes, not to abandon her.

“ You are the only person to whom I can turn for help now,” she pleaded, “ don’t you desert me ; let the money go, I care nothing about it, and remember, unless I had believed you loved me, I should never have got into this trouble.”

Her distress was very great, and moved Mounteagle, in spite of his reflection that soon she would understand all and forgive him.

“ Hush, my darling,” he whispered, “ you are safe in any case ; but I will conquer your father, and have my own way in this, if it can be done.”

He ceased speaking as Mr. Courtenay came again towards them, and Ethel, beginning dimly to comprehend there might be something in this mode of proceeding that she did not understand, stood aside and waited.

“ Leave the room,” said Mr. Courtenay, with a waive of his hand to her, when he came near them ; “ I had hoped that seeing what sort of a man this was you had chosen, common

sense would have prevailed, and that you would have taken Morton instead. As this seems not to be the case, however, you may go; it is not fit that you should hear bargaining and chaffering going on about you, as though you were being sold like one of the cattle on the farm, and your lover" (he spoke the word with a bitter sneer), "does not seem inclined to spare you that!"

She glanced at Mounteagle, but he made no movement to detain her, and, with a heart heavy with apprehension, she left the room. She could not understand her lover's mode of action, his whole manner was so different from what it was the day when she met him out among the plantations. She knew she had shown him too much of her feelings then, had perhaps drawn him into feigning a love he did not really feel; and yet how was it possible she could be mistaken on such a subject? How could a man counterfeit the looks and tones of passionate affection, if he did not experience it in his heart? She could not comprehend it; one thing only was evident, he cared for what she could bring him, a great deal more than he did for herself—she was buying him, but, to her, she felt the

purchase was worth the money she paid.

“Now we will proceed to business,” said Mr. Courtenay, when the door had closed behind Ethel. “It is expedient that she should marry you, and she seems so infatuated as to wish it herself. Anything I give her shall be so strictly settled that you shall not be able to touch a penny, unless she gives it to you, which very likely she will be fool enough to do, but that is the only arrangement in my power to make. I will not give her what I consider more than sufficient to keep her from want out there, as it would only be wasted on your indulgences. I have been thinking the matter over the last few minutes, and have decided to give her one hundred pounds a year, and not one penny more, during my life; so now you may act as you please. If you decide on taking her, the settlements shall be put in hands at once; if my offer doesn’t suit you, the sooner you leave this the better, and let me never see you near here again.”

Mounteagle did not answer immediately; he was thinking whether he could, by any possibility, screw more out of the old gentleman. He certainly was not acting in a liberal manner, and the young man felt strongly inclined to reject

the offer altogether, and marry his daughter without it, notwithstanding the order not to come there again, but prudence prevailed. In spite of his temper, Mounteagle was a calculating man, and could be cool enough when occasion suited; he now remembered that if Mr. Courtenay could be made to do no more, still one hundred pounds a year would be a help, whenever he was out of employment, or inclined to try a new line, and move about from one place to another. He therefore, after a few minutes' thought, raised his head and answered:

“I accept your offer, for the sake of the girl that is to be my wife; it may keep her from suffering want at any time, if I am not fortunate in my new career, and most assuredly it is not enough to give me any opportunities for extravagance. If I was only consulting my own inclination, I should reject it with the contempt so niggardly a settlement from such a man as you deserves; as it is, I have her to think of, and therefore consent to the humiliation of receiving anything from you. The sooner you have the necessary arrangements completed the better, for, as our meeting in this house can

never be very pleasant, I shall persuade Ethel to let the marriage take place as soon as possible. I suppose I may ask to see her now, and talk the matter over with her?"

A few minutes after Mounteagle found himself sitting in the drawing-room, waiting for Ethel to appear. He was the solitary tenant of the large room, and as the minutes wore on without her coming, he began to get very impatient. Suddenly he heard a movement in the passage outside, and the rustling of a dress, as some one advanced towards the door ; he stepped forward to open it, and, in his impatience, he had almost put his arm round the new-comer, before he saw that it was not Ethel. Miss Courtenay, for she it was, drew back quickly.

"Young man," she said, severely, "I should advise you to take no liberties with me. I hear that you are about to marry my niece, and, as the person who has had the management of her from childhood; I think it my duty to come and give you a few hints on her character, and the proper way of managing her."

"I am sure, Miss Courtenay, if you are the person who has brought her up, you deserve

great credit. It is seldom one's fate to meet so beautiful or accomplished a woman."

"No, sir," answered the old lady, with a short, sharp shake of her head, "she's no credit to me; I deny that altogether. Whatever there is praiseworthy about her, is due to nature, and not to me. It was her character I desired to form—it was on her character I laboured, and quite without effect, as you may see. I ask you, is there any resemblance between her manner and mine? There is not—you know it—you cannot but acknowledge that there is not, if you are willing to say what is true fairly, no matter how prejudicial it may be to her."

"Indeed I am quite willing to acknowledge there is no resemblance," replied Mounteagle, with a mental "Thank Heaven!" added.

"Well, and what is the reason of that? What is the reason that, after all my care, she has turned out so utterly unlike a Courtenay, that she might be anyone else, rather than one of them? I will tell you the cause of that," she added, in a confidential manner. "Her mother's family were the Whytes, of Daneton, and it is the amalgamation of the Whyte and Courtenay temper that is so frightful—positively frightful!"

—which has made Ethel the unmanageable, flighty, flirting girl she is! She will give you a great deal of trouble, Mr. Mounteagle, and you must keep watch over her temper. Remember, it is an amalgamation of the Whyte and Courtenay temper, and therefore very peculiar, and particularly difficult to get on with; but if you bear this in mind, you may at least be able to live together. This is what I wanted to warn you of, and speak to you about. I think I hear my niece coming, so I'll wish you good-bye. Don't forget about the Whytes and Courtenays!"

So saying, she left the room, and a minute after Ethel entered it.

CHAPTER VII.

“ **W**HAT was Aunt Caroline saying to you ?” asked Ethel, as soon as Mounteagle had explained to her the arrangements he had made with her father, and without answering his question as to when the marriage should take place.

“ She was warning me against your temper. Is she mad ?”

“ No, not quite, only near it, I think; and that about the temper is a favourite hobby of hers. Did she tell you anything about woollen stockings, fresh bread, afternoon air, or any of those kind of things ?”

“ No, she hadn’t got as far when your coming interrupted her. But you haven’t answered my question, darling, about when we are to be married.”

They went over the matter together, consulting and deliberating on their future life and

plans, and at last settled that the wedding should take place that day three weeks. They were to be married in London, if Mr. Courtenay did not wish the ceremony to take place at Merriton ; which indeed, as matters stood at present, seemed unlikely.

Mounteagle was to send in his papers at once, and determined to run down to Aldershot for a few days, to collect his traps, and say good-bye to his friends. He felt a little nervous at the prospect of meeting the Langhams, but it was better to put a bold face on the matter, and behave as though nothing had ever passed between them when he met Clara, than to avoid her, which would convey to her mind the idea that he felt he had acted badly to her, and might also be noticed by her uncle. All the preliminaries were settled between them, and he bade Ethel good-bye for a few days, before he left that afternoon. She was to write to him at Aldershot, and tell him where the wedding was to be, as soon as she had spoken to her father about it ; and with a very comfortable conviction that he had gained his wish, and not done so very badly after all, Mounteagle returned to barracks.

Of course he communicated his success and his programme to the first of his comrades he met, who happened to be Attwood. This young man went the rounds with it, and by the time they met at mess, Mounteagle was assailed by a perfect storm of congratulations and lamentations; the one on his approaching marriage, the other on his quitting the regiment. For, as Slingsby had told Matthews, Mounteagle was very popular, though most people felt a curious kind of uncertainty in speaking to him, as to how he might take the next observation. But then, as he said himself, he could keep his temper when it suited him to do so, and latterly it had so suited him.

Next day he was in Aldershot, having obtained leave, pending his name appearing in the *Gazette*. Matthews collared him at once.

“Tell us all about it,” he said. “I’m told she has no end of money, besides being beautiful. What a lucky dog you are, to be sure! You get on with the women so swimmingly, and can take which you choose; whereas here am I, who try a great deal harder to please them than, I am sure, you ever do, and I can’t get them to have anything to say to me. Do you remem-

ber Miss Bones, that dreadful girl with the lot of tin, that I used to spoon so awfully! I could have been sure she cared for me, and only put off asking her because her ugliness frightened me. Well, would you believe it, she's gone and married that great red-haired fellow Grant, of the Land Transport; and here am I worse off than I ever was, for I don't know where there's an heiress to pay my court to."

" Well, it is rather a hard case, Matthews; but I don't know that I am so fortunate with the ladies as you try to make out. This is certainly the only case in which I have tried to succeed, and I have done so; but I fancy any man could do the same, if he made up his mind what he wanted, and determined to have it. You see you lost Miss Bones by shilly-shallying about her appearance; as if that mattered one bit, when what you wanted was her money. Depend on it, determination is the thing, so next time you unearth an heiress, go in for her like a man, and don't let any paltry considerations cause you to hesitate."

" Well, I daresay you are right; but you were fortunate enough to fall in with beauty and money combined, which made the matter

easy for you. I am told Morton was fearful spoons on the same girl. Is it true?"

"True enough. I won by a head only. The papa hates me, and wanted Morton at any price; but between us we managed to get our own way. I'm going to see the Colonel—I sent in my papers yesterday, you know. Will you come with me?"

"I don't mind if I do," replied Matthews. "Now, there's a girl, Miss Singleton, that I'd go after in a minute, if she had money. You missed your mark there, Mount. I used to think you soft in that quarter before you left, and had a fancy she cared for you too; but she doesn't—I took the trouble of finding that out while you were away."

"And how, pray?" asked Mounteagle, a little eagerly. He was sure she had loved him—she was not a girl, he told himself, who could possibly have feigned a liking she did not feel, who could have counterfeited the trouble and affection she had displayed the last time they met. She was true, if she was anything, he could have sworn, and he waited somewhat anxiously to hear Matthews's explanation of the way in which he had ascertained the fact he asserted.

"As soon as I heard you were going to be married, I went and told her," answered Matthews; "and as she had no idea of what was coming, it is very certain she would have betrayed herself in some way, had she cared at all about you. However, she laughed, seemed amused, and asked me a good many questions about the affair altogether. You'll be able to judge for yourself that what I say is the case to-day."

When they arrived at the Colonel's, Mounteagle asked first for the ladies, and they were shown at once to the drawing-room, where Clara and her mother were sitting. When the door opened suddenly, and the servant announced Mr. Mounteagle and Mr. Matthews, Clara felt the blood rush to her face, and the room seemed to swim with her, the shock was so unexpected. Fortunately her back was turned towards them, and as they walked across the room, she had a minute to regain her composure, while she busied herself rolling up a long strip of embroidery, at which she had been working, before she got up and turned towards them.

When she did so, her face was no more

flushed than was natural in a person sitting before the fire, and her beautiful grey eyes showed no trace of sadness as she raised them to Mounteagle, saying,

“I may congratulate you on your approaching marriage, may I not? When is it to be, and where? Tell me all about it.”

In that one brief minute, she had steeled herself to bear all the suffering she knew must be before her in that visit. She had nerved herself to look at him with her old sunny smile, to laugh her old ringing laugh, to touch his hand, to listen to his voice, as in the days before she had learnt to know what a capability for joy or pain this man had aroused in her heart. She told herself the misery she endured could not be of long duration—that once this first meeting was over, and carried bravely through, she should not be obliged to bear so severe an ordeal again; so she sat and chatted, keeping up a semblance of interest in the conversation, and of merriment at the good things said, that deceived Mounteagle himself, and caused him to think, “That was the one woman in the world that I believed too true and honest to mislead a man, that she might flatter her

vanity, and I find I was mistaken—she is as bad as the rest. I need not have been so uneasy at having acted unfairly by her—it seems now it was she acted badly by me."

Once only her armour was near being pierced through, when Mounteagle, in a low tone, apologised for not having answered her last letter.

"I was so busy," he murmured, "I could not find time; and my mind was taken up with other things, so I am sure you will excuse me."

"How could he allude to it?" she thought, "knowing, as he must do, that she would never have written to him had she not imagined his mind was occupied with far other things, and with a far different person from the one with whom he now acknowledged it to have been taken up." For a moment her eyes blazed with indignation, and her lip trembled, but she conquered herself by a last supreme effort, and answered with a smile,

"The cause pleads your excuse sufficiently—you were pardoned as soon as I heard through Mr. Matthews what I guessed to be the reason of your silence."

At length the visit was over. They had seen

the Colonel and left, and then Clara had time to think over what had occurred, and to question herself as to how she had played her part. She got an answer from a quarter whence she had not expected it. Her mother, looking up suddenly, said,

“Come, Clara, tell us all about the bride and the courtship. I noticed you and Mr. Mounteagle were having a good deal of talk and fun over it, and I was glad to see it, for at one time I was afraid you might have cared for that man. Certainly any other girl thrown constantly in his society as you were, would have suffered for it; but you are not like any woman I ever met in that way.”

“*A rara avis, mamma,*” laughed Clara, leaning back in her chair, and closing her eyes, that ached with the tears kept back by her strong will. She knew now her trial was not over, that she would have to repeat all she had heard from Mounteagle that day, the mere remembrance of which stirred up bitter, weary thoughts within her. But if she must do it at all, better do it now in the gloaming, before lights were brought in, and kindly eyes might guess the cause of the tired, aching eyelids, resting so heavily on the colourless cheek.

The day wore through at last, the story had been told, the part acted. Henceforth the paths in life of these two must lie far apart ; the one had gained the desire of his heart, and the light of his eyes, the other had ventured her all upon one chance and lost it. Whether the future should have anything further in store for her she knew not, neither did she desire it. Life seemed to her to have become suddenly very dreary, one long continuous battle between the selfish wish that she might lie down and die, now that her stake in the game of life was played out, and determination to be up and do her duty, as long as strength should be left her to do it.

How it fared with her in after-times, we cannot tell at present ; the story follows the fortunes of Mounteagle for a while, whose affairs, once it was settled he should marry Ethel Courtenay, went on smoothly enough. Mr. Courtenay decided that the ceremony should be performed very quietly in London. The marriage was against his wishes in every way, and he did not choose to give the festivities that he knew would be expected of him, if it occurred down in his own place.

Thus on a gloomy December morning they were married, the only relatives of the bride who were present being her father and aunt; the latter having come provided with a huge woollen shawl, which she besought Ethel to wrap round her when leaving the church, a chill being very easily taken, when dressed in a manner so unsuitable for the season of the year, and when unprovided with any extra covering. The bride rejected the proffered muffle rather disdainfully, at which the old lady shook her head, and muttered something about the amalgamation of the Whyte and Courtenay temper. The bridegroom was only attended by one or two of his brother officers, and the breakfast was dull and quiet. Altogether, it was rather a mournful affair, and exercised a depressing influence on the spirits of the young men, who, on their return to Aldershot, reported that it had been much more like a well-conducted funeral than a wedding, though the bride and bridegroom both looked happy.

They had taken their passage in a clipper ship bound for Melbourne, but she would not sail for three weeks, and the intermediate time they spent in London, going about and amusing

themselves a good deal. They were both very much in love after their fashion, and life seemed very bright and pleasant to them just then. Ethel rather dreaded the voyage, and was determined to have as much fun as she could beforehand; and if Mounteagle looked forward to the sea trip with more pleasure than she did, he was not one whit behind her in appreciation of the amusements of London. Then they were busy too; they had to see to the fitting up of their cabin, which they accomplished in a very comfortable but rather extravagant fashion; they had to lay in a stock of small luxuries for the voyage, pack their things in proper boxes, and provide themselves with whatever they imagined likely to be useful in the country to which they were going. Mounteagle's wish was to purchase a run from some well-established squatter; or if that should be impossible, enter into partnership with some one of that description. The diggings might have had an attraction for him formerly, but since he had married he had abandoned all idea of them, though he intended to go along with his wife and take a look at them, before he settled down anywhere. Their brief honeymoon in London at length

came to an end. The day arrived when they must embark, and they went down to Gravesend, determined to put off the fatal minute as long as possible, and get on board when the ship came down.

It was mid-winter, and bitterly cold, but they enjoyed a good dinner, the last for many weeks that they should eat on *terra firma*; and they were just warming themselves over the fire, which obstinately refused to burn, much as its warmth was needed, when the waterman sent up to say the ship was coming in sight. Leaving their fire, which had just begun to burn up, very regretfully, they were rowed out into the stream; and here, when the ship cast anchor, they were taken on board, Mounteagle climbing up the side by the ladder, Ethel being taken up in a chair swung from the main yard-arm on purpose for the convenience of ladies. There were not many passengers on board the *Templeton*, Ethel observed during tea-time, and those she saw struck her as being not a very nice set.

The captain was a tall, dark man, and when it is said that he had risen from before the mast, it hardly conveys a correct idea of what

he was to those who are accustomed to the merchant-service, where almost everyone passes through that state of servitude, whether well-born or not. The Captain, however, had no good birth to boast of, or any pretensions to breeding or education of any kind, except that connected with his profession, and it always was more or less of a puzzle to Ethel to conceive how he had acquired even that. He must have belonged to the labouring class originally, but, by good fortune and ability, had raised himself to the rank of captain, a post which he had now held for some years on the *Templeton*. He was a man of violent, jealous temper, very apt to take offence where none was intended, and to brood over fancied slights till they appeared grievances in his eyes ; but for all that he was an honourable, upright man, who would keep a promise to his own hurt, and as warm-hearted as he was passionate—silent with most people, and possessing a keen insight into character, those to whom he conceived a dislike generally turning out untrustworthy. Such was Captain Laneton of the *Templeton* ; he had not long been married, but did not take his wife with him, though many of the merchant-captains do so.

The chief officer was a fair, good-looking man, about the middle height, quick-tempered, energetic, and a smart sailor. In contradistinction to the Captain, Ethel speedily noticed that he was a well-read, well-informed man on most topics of the day, and he shortly became her husband's most frequent companion throughout the voyage; not at first, however, as for a while he was still too much in love to need any other companionship than that of his wife, and the other passengers keeping somewhat aloof from them, they had plenty of time to enjoy each other's society.

Life on board ship is pretty sure before long to expose all the bad points of a person's character. If it be selfishness, no matter how well that failing has been concealed on land, it soon shows itself among the inconveniences and discomforts of ship-board; if it be passion, the slightest indulgence in it is overheard and commented on; and so it is with all other faults or failings to which human nature is subject. The space is so circumscribed, the interests of the community are so bound up together, that one false move affects all, and reveals the delinquent in his or her true character, no matter

how carefully it may have been concealed. Thus Mounteagle, soon beginning to grow weary of the monotony of his life, and naturally averse to anything that put him out of his way, began to lose temper occasionally, when Ethel was not quite ready to oblige him by doing everything he wanted the minute he asked her to do it. She was not tidy in her cabin, and left things tumbling about which he had ordered her to put up, and the end of it would be that he would have to do it for himself. She had struck up an acquaintance with one or two of the other passengers, and particularly with the Captain, and this did not please Mounteagle either ; she did not flirt with any of them, but he considered she should devote her whole time and attention to him, and it annoyed him, when he wanted much to be amused, to see her deep in a conversation with Captain Laneton, which he knew she would not break off to come and play chess with him, or read aloud to him, or do any of the little services by which he liked to have the time wiled away for him.

As they got into the tropics, and the heat began to exercise its enervating influence on

him, his temper became more irritable ; and one day, when he had not been able to get her to sing for him just at the precise moment when he fancied it would amuse him to be sung to, he turned on her angrily when she next came into their cabin, and said that, considering she had brought him there, the least she could do was to devote herself to him, and make the time pass as pleasantly as she could.

“ I brought you here ! ” she exclaimed. “ Pray how do you make that out ? I would have been quite content to go soldiering with you.”

“ Yes ! indeed—as if I would go about as a subaltern with a wife, when your stingy father did not give you money enough to enable you to go about without roughing ! I repeat, but for you I should be with the —th’ now ; and I wish I was there ! ”

She looked at him in amazement. To do her justice, her character had been much improved since her marriage ; she felt her hold over her husband was but slight, and she had tried hard to overcome her faults, and accommodate herself to his disposition as much as possible. It was but a phase of the selfishness of her nature, but it called for self-denial in one way, if it

arose from the wish to please herself in another, and therefore it was a praiseworthy effort in her. She could hardly realise that she had done anything to offend him, and felt hurt at being unjustly blamed.

“I don’t think it is my fault, more than your own,” she answered, “that you are here. It was your own wish to marry me, I suppose—why did you ask me else?”

“Well, I must say that’s cool,” he replied, sneering. “I should like to know whether I had run after you, or in any way paid you attention since I met you first, till that day when you found me in the shrubbery?—and it was you made the advances then. I won’t say I wasn’t bewitched and fooled by you, as I, and many another fellow, had been before, but I will say that, but for your encouragement, it is extremely unlikely I ever would have spoken; and so, as I said before, it is you who brought me here.”

“And do you regret having been bewitched and fooled, as you call it, by me?” she asked, slowly; “do you regret the encouragement that made you speak?”

There was something unusual in her tone,

that made Mounteagle pause and look at her, before he replied :

“ Well, I don’t say exactly that, because we get on very well together—a great deal better, I am sure, than I ever should get on with any other woman—but still it isn’t very jolly being cooped up here so long, you know, and everyone must wish for a little change of society, now and then. *Toujours perdrix* is wearisome to my taste. I’m off to Bowen now, and I hope, next time I want you, I shall be able to get you, which is not generally the case.”

When he was gone to the mate, and was amusing himself listening to the yarns that Mr. Bowen was an adept at spinning, Ethel began to question herself severely whether she was in any way to blame for this unreasonable ebullition of temper. They had only been three weeks out, and already Herbert had more than once hinted he was getting tired of her ; and the more devoted to him she was, the more trouble she took to please him, the more querulous and ungracious did he become. She knew both Captain and passengers had remarked his snappish answers to her once or twice ; she had seen the Captain’s brow contract,

and his dark eyes flash with evident displeasure, when Mounteagle had scolded her for something the day before. She fancied he had thought how differently he would have spoken to his young wife, and she felt degraded that this rough, uncouth seaman should have noticed her husband's manner, and made such a comment upon it. She cried a little over the disappointed feeling that was beginning to spring up in her heart. Tears were her usual resource in any difficulty, and she was still weeping when she heard a knock at the door. Hastily drying her eyes she opened it, turning her head away, that whoever the intruder might be, he or she should not observe her tears. It was Captain Laneton, who said,

"I heard you saying you wished to see a shark, Mrs. Mounteagle; if you'll come on deck now, you'll maybe get a glimpse of a big fellow that's playing astern. We've thrown out a hook well baited, but he doesn't seem inclined to bite, I wish he would, for we're badly wanting a breeze, and, if we caught this fellow, we'd get one soon enough."

"Oh! I shall be so glad to see it!" she cried, forgetting her troubles, and hurrying up with-

out waiting to put on a hat. The Captain followed her, and together they went over the stern, whilst he pointed out the shark. As she raised her eyes to his, to ask him some question about the fish, he perceived that she had been crying.

“That brute, her husband, has been bullying her again!” he thought. “I should like to pay him out for it, but that would only make matters worse, so I’d better keep quiet, and try to make things as pleasant for the poor little woman as I can.”

And so he did; but all his civility could not prevent Mounteagle’s temper becoming worse and worse, as he found himself more and more bored. He was not a reading man, and therefore the ship’s library was little relief to the *ennui* from which he suffered. At length one day, in an evil hour both for him and her, they had a sharp dispute—the subject of the discussion was very trivial—something that should have been packed in one of the boxes wanted on the voyage, and which Ethel was positive she had packed in one of them, only on searching it was nowhere to be found, and therefore must, Mounteagle concluded, be in one of the

soldered down boxes in the hold, where he could not get it till he arrived in Melbourne. His anger was quite out of proportion to the triviality of the cause, and Ethel's dormant spirit was roused at last—she answered him boldly and bitterly, as she had been used to answer her aunt in bygone days. As her temper rose, his cooled, and he amused himself by aggravating her to the last pitch of endurance.

“Ah,” he said at length, when he began to get weary of that excitement, “I remember your aunt warning me about your temper, but you never favoured me with a sight of it till now. Really I must say it surpasses all the expectations I had formed from what Miss Courtenay told me.”

The mention of her aunt's name, and the recollection of the day when she had surprised her leaving the drawing-room, overcame the young wife's passionate childish heart, and she burst into a flood of tears.

“Oh! Herbert,” she said, approaching him, “you are so different from what you were then—think how happy we were that day, and don't let us quarrel in this dreadful manner any more.”

"You are different if you like," he answered, sulkily. "I am the same always—bad at the best, I admit, but consistent. The best thing we can do is to keep out of each other's way as much as possible, until you can learn to make yourself a little more agreeable. It's Webster's watch on deck now, I think—I'll go and have a yarn with him; he's awfully Scotch, and as queer a fish as ever breathed; but he tells thundering good yarns, and doesn't stick at anything in or out of the course of nature. If you'd cultivate him, instead of that silent, taciturn Laneton, you'd be more lively; and you'd find Bowen not a bad fellow either."

"Thank you," answered Ethel, indignant that her overtures of friendship should be so received—"I can choose my own friends; and I don't like Mr. Webster—he sees everything, and chaffs one about it, whether he ought or not. What business has he to talk about my temper, I should like to know?"

"What! did he do that?" laughed her husband. "My word, he's a forward fellow! You see how necessary it will be for you to disguise it, if you want to escape the ill word of a man like that. He hasn't got too good a temper

himself, I should say. Just hear how he's pitching into some one; and his Scotch is so broad, when he gets angry, that I wonder any one can understand him who is not as Scotch as himself." Thus speaking, Mounteagle got up, stretched himself, and sauntered out of the cabin, looking in again at the door to say, "Notwithstanding his remark on your temper, I should advise you to cultivate Webster—he'll tell you all about how he was engaged to be married, and how the woman jilted him, and how he escaped thus the doom of matrimony, and many other instructive tales with the like moral—namely, that the man who marries unless he cannot help himself, is a fool." With which kind speech he shut the door and left her.

When she was sure she was alone, she again indulged in the solace of tears; but this time they wouldn't flow freely—she was too deeply wounded to find relief in her usual facile weeping, and strange thoughts, such as had never come into her mind before, disturbed her. Was it possible that she had made a great mistake?—that this man was not what she had thought him?—and not only that, for that she

could have borne, as in the time when she loved him most, his character had never appeared a very worthy one, even in her eyes; but was it possible she had mistaken herself also, that the love she had felt for him was of the feeble, fickle kind that the first breath of harsh usage could wither and drive away? There was something within her that made her fear this might be the case, and she dreaded to find it so. What should she do in the strange land whither they were bound, far from familiar sights and sounds, from homely, friendly faces, if the husband in whom she trusted for a protector and companion should fail her, and become instead a tyrant and oppressor. She felt very lonely and desolate. The people on board were none of them in her own class in life, and formed a clique in themselves. Bowen and Webster, her husband's friends, were not congenial to her; the only one in whose company she found any comfort was Captain Lantton, and to his steady, silent, unobtrusive friendship, her mind turned as the only pleasant thing in her present dreary life.

What could possibly be the cause of her husband's moroseness and constant ill-temper with

her? Had he grown tired of her, of her pretty, coquettish ways and winning wiles, practised now only on him, and not lavished on all indiscriminately, as had formerly been her custom?

The Captain was almost the only person on board with whom she was very friendly, and when she next went on deck with her work he came over and sat beside her, whilst she talked to him about the dangers and adventures of a seafaring life; all the while keeping one eye on her husband, who was tramping up and down the weather-side of the poop, in company with Mr. Webster, whose roars of laughter, every now and then mingling with her husband's quieter merriment, convinced her they were amusing themselves.

He and the second mate continued their walk up and down, backwards and forwards, the conversation chiefly carried on in Mr. Webster's broad Scotch, interrupted now and then, when he stopped by the binnacle to look at the compass, and take a glance aloft, or down at the break of the poop, where he would stand and shout in incomprehensible jargon, meant to be English, but chiefly Scotch, about the trimming of the yards, or to take a pull on the halyards,

or something of that sort. Then Mounteagle would stand by quietly till he was finished, and they would resume their monotonous tramp. Ethel's pre-occupation with her husband did not escape the keen eyes of Captain Laneton; he could see how, in the midst of the most animated conversation, her eyes would follow him to the end of the deck, and then, as he turned towards them, she would again occupy herself with her work and her companion.

"Poor young thing," he thought, "she has a hard time of it before her with that bully of a man. He hasn't an idea in the world but himself, and what may be for his own advantage and profit. This little woman cares for him a great deal more than is good for her happiness, poor child! I must try to amuse her—keep her from thinking about him as much as I can!" He meant to be kind, and never for one moment imagined there was danger either to her or himself in the resolution he had just taken; that her husband was likely to be jealous of his attentions he could not believe, he seemed so entirely indifferent to what his pretty young wife did or said. "She's going out to a dangerous place, too, for a girl in her position,"

thought Laneton. "There's plenty there will find her beautiful, and tell her so, even if her husband don't. I wonder to what part of the colony they're going?" He asked her, but she told him she did not know; she thought they would remain in Melbourne for a-while, until her husband should get the opening he wanted. "At any rate," thought her self-constituted guardian, "I shall see her again there, and be able to judge how he is behaving to her, before I leave."

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETIMES Laneton would indulge his listener with queer, shrewd hits at the characters of the people on board. His talent for reading the inner nature of those around was quite wonderful, as Ethel afterwards found, and it used to amuse her very much when he would launch out into a description of the mental state of some one or other of her fellow-passengers. On her and her husband he never touched, however. Once she incautiously asked him, saying,

“ Well, now you have told me something about everybody else, tell me something about us. Begin with me, and then go on to Herbert.”

He looked earnestly at her for a minute, and then said,

“ No, I won’t do that. I don’t think it would be safe, and you mightn’t forgive me.”

There was something peculiar in his tone,

that caused Ethel to colour, and feel half offended. She could not tell what he had meant, whether his manner expressed praise or blame of them both, or of one of them in particular ; but it made her feel uncomfortable, and seeing her husband leaning over the side a short distance from her, she went over to speak to him.

“What have I done or said to offend her?” thought Captain Laneton, watching her as she slipped her arm inside Mounteagle’s, and smiled up in his face while speaking to him. “She might spare herself taking so much trouble to please him,” he went on ; “for he don’t care a bit for her, and is only bored when she makes up to him. Ain’t she a proud little thing ? And how she coloured up when I spoke just then ! I didn’t know I had said anything that could annoy her, though. But I couldn’t tell her what I thought of her husband—it wouldn’t have been safe ; nor yet of herself either, poor dear !—she might think me impertinent.”

Presently the Captain rose and began to walk up and down the deck, thinking deeply about the future of the young couple who had just gone below, and his mind very much disturbed by fears for Ethel’s happiness.

“ What’s in the wind now?” thought Mr. Bowen, the mate; “ there must be something up when the skipper begins to walk that way. Shouldn’t wonder if we were ordered to trim the yards presently.” But for this once Mr. Bowen was mistaken. The Captain, though he went through the appearance of being deeply busy with the ship, was in reality thinking of far other things; and once or twice, when he stood looking at the binnacle, and the quarter-master expected a sharp word or two for being half a point off his course, he escaped free, a thing which he did not at all understand, Laneton being in general very particular. Up and down, down and up, went the Captain; he would have been better below for all the good he was doing above, but still he continued his monotonous tramp, till an invalid lady sent up to see who it was that was making the noise, and to request him to walk down to leeward. Her attendant, on seeing the delinquent, wisely forbore to deliver the message, and going down again told her the walker was the Captain; at which Miss James, the invalid, sighed peevishly, and said “ she might have known it, as nobody else on board would have made such a noise.”

When the watch was relieved, the two mates exchanged a few words relative to the looks of things in general, before the one went below to turn in, and the other took command on deck.

“Watch the old man, Webster,” said Bowen, just as he was going below; “there’s something all wrong with him, and I can’t make out what it is;” but even while they were speaking the Captain had gone below, and Mr. Webster consequently was unable to discover anything.

If the passengers had been pleasant, how very delightful that ship-life might have been! Ethel was never sea-sick, and the bright sunny monotonous days in the tropics reminded her of dreamland. Shut up with a number of people in the narrow compass of a ship, knowing nothing of the past, nothing of what is likely to be the future of your companions, only associated with their present, they produce the vague, shadowy impression of the figures that flit through the mind in sleep; and this under a hazy blue sky, sailing over a bluer sea, where every wavelet that sparkles in the sun is crowned with a rainbow, and the crests torn from the billows by the sultry breeze flash like diamonds

as they sweep past. All this fairy scenery adds to the illusion, and if the heart is at rest, the traveller would fain dream on for ever.

When they left the tropics and dashed on with a stronger breeze over a stormier sea, it was still the same to her. Even if she had been disappointed in much that she had expected, and though her husband became less kind and harder to please day by day, still she reflected she was better off there on board than she could hope to be on land. Then he would be out all day, away either working or amusing himself, it did not much matter to her which it was, as in any case she knew she could see but little of him. The only friend she had made on board, Captain Laneton, had lately seemed estranged from her, she did not know why, but she missed his company often; she knew he had been a friend, and she did not feel quite so lonely when he was near as she should feel when she landed in Australia, and had to make new friends in a strange country.

They had not long left the tropics when they encountered a heavy gale, and this Ethel was a good enough sailor to enjoy, untroubled by any fear of danger. That was a thing she never thought of, and she managed to obtain per-

mission to sit on deck as soon as day broke, and watch the billows as they rolled past.

Sometimes the ship would mount up on the top of one of those grand South Atlantic rollers, and she seemed to look down into a deep valley stretching far below them, as from the summit of a mountain one looks down into the green lowland ; then they themselves would be plunged into the abyss, and see surging after them a huge mountain of water, gathering itself higher and higher, creeping nearer and nearer, towering above the stern till it seemed as if it must tumble on top of them and overwhelm them. She would hold her breath and tighten her grasp on her seat, when suddenly the water would seem to subside under them, she would feel the ship mounting higher and higher, and then again they were borne along upon the crest of the wave once more. Skimming with slow sweeping flight over the green foam-crested billows, were one or two albatrosses, the first they had seen during the voyage, and Ethel gazed on these wanderers of the deep with feelings of longing not unmixed with envy. How delicious it would be, she thought, to wander thus over the trackless waste, braving the war of the tempest, and revelling in

the tumult of the mighty ocean ; dreaming idly on outstretched wing during the sultry noon-tide in calm weather, floating rapidly onwards, borne by the force of the wind, during a storm ! To poise on strong untiring wing over the ships as they pass on their way, noticing what there was on board of human joy and sorrow, hope and fear, rejoicing that in none of these things could their nature take part ; pitying the weariness of the human lot, that condemns to ceaseless, constant drudgery almost the whole race of men. Ah ! it would be an exquisite life she mused, the very perfection of existence, for there no sorrow nor disappointment could touch one ; and if one had no joy, at least one would have no grief.

It had come to this then already with her—that she would give up happiness, if by so doing she could also give up pain ; and yet not quite that, for a minute afterwards she recollected what she had been thinking, and corrected herself.

“ No, I don’t know that I should quite like that,” she mused ; “ for then what would become of Herbert ? It’s true he doesn’t care for me as he did, and I don’t suppose I am very passionately attached to him either—it’s not in

me to leave everyone very much : but still I think I'll if we're to leave, and that he would be worse without me in good-hope of the bird dream, though it's a pleasant one. He'll laugh at me for thinking what a thing, and yet it does look as if it would be delightful."

How strange and dismaliated the ship seemed to her when she looked round at it in its present trim! They were running under fore and main top-gallants, three reefed, and the great masts looked gaunt and right under so small a spread of canvas. The main deck was constantly swept by the waves, as the vessel rolled from one side to the other, and there was a breach in the bulwarks forward, where a sea had swept its way through during the night. But the gale was abating now; the sun had come out, and though the wind continued high, it was no longer the fearful hurricane that had raged during the night; and before night-fall the gallant ship was under her usual amount of canvas.

As time wore on, Mounteagle became more and more disagreeable in his manner towards his wife, hardly putting on the semblance of courtesy when speaking to her before other people; and sometimes, at his cold, disparaging words,

Ethel would see Laneton's eyes flash, and the lines of his face grow rigid, as though he with difficulty restrained himself from teaching his passenger to be more civil in addressing a lady, no matter whether she was his wife or not.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE night, just before tea-time, Mounteagle came into her cabin in an unusually bad temper; he had been playing cards with some of the other passengers, had lost more money than he liked, and this had disturbed his equanimity. Something she did aroused his wrath, and he turned on her fiercely, telling her he wished he had never seen her—that his marriage had been a trouble to him from the very first, and that the miserable pittance she got from her father did not pay him for the trouble of taking her about with him. She had long got over the stage of crying at such outbursts, unless she found it convenient to cry about them, and on this night in particular she returned him one or two sharp answers, till the expression of his face warned her she had gone too far, when she stopped, and waited to hear what he was about to say.

"I wish to heaven," he began, in a low tone of concentrated bitterness and rage, "that I had been true to Clara Singleton, and not been befooled by your beauty! What I am enduring now from you is only what I deserve for the way in which I treated her."

"And who might she be?" asked his wife, scornfully.

"The only good and true-hearted woman I ever met," replied Mounteagle, going out of the cabin, and shutting the door behind him.

Left to herself, with these words ringing in her ears, Ethel laid her head on her pillow and wept violently, tears of spite and rage. She didn't mind his abusing her now—she was pretty well used to that—but that he should praise another woman to her was more than she could or would endure. And who could this person be? She had never heard him speak of her before; but he should pay for having mentioned her now—on that she was determined. As she made this resolution, her tears flowed faster, till, when the tea-bell rang, she was obliged to stop her crying suddenly, and sponge her eyes and face, to hide the traces of recent weeping.

Her place was always at the Captain's left-hand side, and to-night, as she seated herself beside him, his quick glance at once detected that she had been weeping ; he scowled darkly at Mounteagle, who placidly continued eating, not suspecting anything wrong, Laneton, however, pretended to have observed nothing, and was only, if possible, more attentive and deferential in his manner to her than usual. When she went on deck afterwards to take her evening walk, he came of his own accord, and paced up and down with her, talking but little whilst they walked, until presently she stopped in the stern, and leaning over the railing, watched the white wake of the ship, as it shone out with phosphoric lustre from the dark waters around. Then he spoke :

“ What had you been crying about before tea ? ”

“ Crying ! ” she repeated—“ what put such an idea into your head ? ”

“ You needn’t try to deceive me,” he answered ; “ you might have been able to do it once on a time—you couldn’t do so now. You had been crying : had he been bullying you ? ”

It was the first time he had ever alluded to her husband's conduct to her, but he did so now in a calm, matter-of-fact way, as if it was an understood thing between them, and one about which they had often spoken before. She felt that she ought to reprove him—that she ought to show him she would not allow her husband's name to be commented on between them; but she was flurried and nervous, and all she could manage to say was,

“I don't know to what you allude, Captain Laneton.”

“Don't speak to me in that stiff way,” he replied. “I know very well there has been something wrong between you and Mr. Mount-eagle. I don't want to speak about it, or to hear what it was; I know who was to blame, and that's enough. He's a hard fellow, is your husband. God Almighty couldn't please him, I believe; and so how is it to be expected you could do so?”

Ethel was annoyed at his remarks, and tried to look angry, but the ending of the speech somewhat mollified her, and she smiled in spite of herself. Laneton looked at her in a surprised manner, as if her smile was uncalled-for

and out of place. She saw it, and checking herself replied,

“I couldn’t help smiling, Captain, at what you said; but I must request you in future not to mention Mr. Mounteagle to me at all, if you wish to speak of him in such disparaging terms.”

She turned away, and would have left him, but he stopped her, saying,

“In a day or two at most now we shall arrive at Port Philip, and, once you land, goodness knows whether I shall ever see you again——”

Before he could finish what he was about to say, a strong, cruel grasp was laid on her shoulder, and Laneton was pushed roughly aside. With a smile of welcome Ethel turned to her husband, who had come up behind them, and clasped her hands on his arm. But he shook her off roughly, and turning to Laneton, said,

“My account with you, sir, cannot be settled whilst we are on board, but once we are both on land, you shall answer to me for your conduct. As for you,” he added, turning to Ethel, who became more terrified as she perceived that instead of a friend her husband

was transformed into a judge, and one, moreover, that had decided the case before hearing it, "you shall come below with me now. I have something to say to you that I do not choose to say up here. Follow me."

Mechanically she obeyed him, followed him to their cabin, and seated herself on one of the boxes he pointed out to her. He had shut and bolted the door, but did not speak for a minute or two ; indeed it seemed to her, as she watched him with timid curiosity, that he had not quite made up his mind what course to pursue.

And that was precisely the state of the case with him. He was heartily tired by this time of the beauty he had so coveted a few months before ; and there was little in Ethel's character to retain the affection of a man like Mounteagle, once the first novelty had worn off. Besides, he had come to the conclusion that she was likely to be very much in his way in the roving life he had made up his mind to lead ; therefore, all things considered, he would not have cared very much had she acquiesced in the plan that he imagined Laneton had been urging upon her. But there was another thing to be considered, and that was, that by her leaving him,

or his leaving her, whichever way it went, he would lose the pittance, small though it was, that Mr. Courtenay had settled upon her. He did not quite like at first to give up the few benefits that might accrue from the certainty of a small yearly sum of money, and they were doubts on this subject that occupied him, while his wife sat silently watching him. After all, it was not worth his while putting himself to inconvenience for so small a sum. He had three hundred a year of his own, besides the proceeds of the sale of his commission, and surely that would enable him to get on very well, either with or without work, in a place where he should not be obliged to present as good an appearance as he had been obliged to keep up in the —th. Decidedly, whatever the loss might be, it would be more than compensated by the advantage he would derive from being free once more.

Looking up when he had arrived at this conclusion, he found his wife's golden brown eyes fixed upon him with more of apprehension in their look than was usual to them; it was as though she knew she had done wrong, and was afraid of the punishment that awaited her.

“After what I have just seen and overheard,”

he began, "you cannot expect that I should continue to feel the love and regard for you I have felt. I have been deceived in and by you, as men always are deceived by women; but I don't intend to reproach you for your inconstancy, or to comment on the choice you have made of an object for your fickle affections. Such comments and reproaches are useless when the evil has already spread so far, and you have my full permission to make the best you can of him when I have done with him. The chance is, there won't be much of him left then," he continued, with a savage laugh.

Horror-struck at seeing the idea he had taken up, even Ethel's ready tears failed her, and for a moment she could only clasp her hands and gaze into his dark, stern face with unutterable terror and misery in her troubled eyes.

"I have done nothing wrong," she murmured at length—"at least, not wrong to you—you have no cause to blame me—you are wrong in your suspicion, I assure you, both to him and me. Do not leave me alone in this wide, strange country, with no protector and no friends!"

Her tears began to fall as she ceased speak-

ing, and her words had the accent of truth; but Mounteagle hardened his heart against her forlorn position, and her assertion of innocence. He had not been so near escape, and with so good an excuse too, that he should rush back into bondage again because of a woman's tears and pretty despondent attitude. She was a good actress, he knew, but she had acted too often with him before for him to be taken in by her now.

"I am not quite such a fool," he answered, in a harsher and sterner voice, trying to work himself up to believing what he said, "as to think you were listening unwillingly to Lane-ton's words; neither did you make even the faintest attempt to interrupt him or to leave him, until I came up and separated you. And you tell me then you have not wronged me, when you allowed him to speak of me as he was speaking. I daresay you could make me believe a good deal, but you will not make me believe that; after all, it serves me right to be treated thus. What a fool I was ever to trust myself in your hands!—I might have known the treatment I would receive from the woman who behaved so badly to me the day on

which I confessed my love to her for the first time. Had I been wise, I would never have looked on your treacherous, beautiful face again ; being a fool, I did so. Even the remembrance of what I suffered that day, though it hardened my heart and warped my life, did not cure my infatuation ; but though I loved still, how different a love it was from the one I had offered you with such intense faith and devotion a few months before—a faith that neither you nor any other woman can ever be worth in my eyes in future. The love I gave you when I married you was as different from my boyish adoration as darkness is from light; and even it is now worn out. I have found how little there is that is lovable underneath all your beauty ; and it wearies me to have continually before my eyes the wiles and allurements that have lost their charm for me, since I know they are but traps to catch the unwary, and that I was caught only to be as little valued and more deceived than those that you toss aside at once as worthless. Whilst we remain on board, I will, for your sake, keep up the appearance of friendliness, if you choose to abandon your companionship with the captain—indeed, if you

will not do it willingly, you shall do it perforce, as I will not have a scandal here. When we arrive at Port Philip, which will probably be to-morrow, I shall leave you, and you shall be free to act as you choose, unbiassed by any fear of me, or dread of my turning up to look after you, as I shall there wash my hands of you for ever!"

. In an agony of alarm, sorrow, and the love she yet felt for her worthless husband, Ethel threw herself on her knees before him, and besought him not to leave her.

"I am not fit to manage things for myself out here, so far away from home, and I am so friendless. If not for love, at least for pity's sake, don't desert me! I'll never see or speak to the Captain again. But I am true to you, dear, in spite of what you think. Don't forsake me!"

Her sobs choked her, and she stopped speaking, but held one hand which she had caught convulsively. He felt a little moved—after all, it was not so long ago since he had loved this girl, and she was his wife besides, though that sacred title conveyed no idea to his mind but one of bondage. Still he had a kind of notion

it was cowardly to bully his wife, and it would be so easy to accomplish his object without all this noise and fuss. Bending over her with the semblance of an affection he did not at all feel, he raised her, and said,

“Remember then, if I pardon you, and take you again into my confidence, you must avoid the man who has dared to insult you by speaking of me as he has spoken to you to-day. He shall not escape the punishment due to him for it; until we land I can do nothing to him, except insist on your avoiding him. Promise me that.”

“I promise,” answered Ethel, still sobbing, but quietly now, and leaning her head against her husband’s shoulder, little dreaming what schemes against her happiness he was planning, while he held her thus tenderly in his arms. In very truth, whatever good there ever had been in his character, seemed by this time to have vanished, except the careless good-nature that always prompted him to lend money to anyone who asked his aid in that way, till he was high and dry himself, when he would resort to any means to replace what he had squandered; gambling was his most usual method of

replenishing his purse—he having, as his comrades used to observe, “the devil’s own luck with the cards.” For the time Ethel thought all danger was tided over; but the fright she had received warned her how careful she must be in future not to arouse the sullen, revengeful temper that formed the ground-work of her husband’s character.

When he left her at last and went on deck, she sat down on a box, and tried to think over the events of the last few hours. When tea-time came she would fain have made the excuse of a headache, and remained in her own cabin. A heartache would have been a more correct term, for her husband’s words rankled in her and wounded her. But Mounteagle insisted on her coming in as usual; and then she found she need not have dreaded appearing, as Laneton sent in to excuse himself from attending, on the plea that they were too near land to permit of his leaving the deck.

“The old man’s in a deuce of a temper,” she overheard Mr. Webster saying to one of the passengers sitting near him. “He expects to see the light at the heads at nine o’clock to-night, and he’s fussing, and fidgeting, and trimming the yards, and rowing the quartermaster,

till we don't know what to do with him ; and the worst of it is, he'll still be on deck when it comes to my watch again—indeed I doubt he'll not turn in to-night, he's so crusty."

Ethel felt the colour rise into her face as she overheard this, though, as no one was looking at her, it didn't matter. She decided she would not go on deck after tea ; it did not matter now how much she stayed below, they would soon be on shore, and then there would be an end of all need of confinement or seclusion. Perhaps she dared to hope her husband's love would return, at least in some slight degree, when he was removed from the disagreeable associations and wearisome monotony of ship-life.

When the other passengers came trooping on deck after tea, they were running before a fair wind, yet the lights on Lonsdale Head would never have been seen by the Captain at the appointed time, had he not communicated his anticipations to Mr. Webster, who was officer of the watch, and who had stationed a man in the foretop to look out. Rather later than had been expected, the light became visible below, and people flocked from all parts of the ship to every point from which they could get a view of it.

We have taken our pilot on board, and are just outside the Heads ; the wind has shifted, and we shan't get up by daybreak to-morrow." He spoke kindly and quietly, and his young wife's heart bounded at the thought, that perhaps to-morrow, with the commencement of fresh interests and a new life, his love for her might revive, and she might be happy once more, as she had been for so short a time after her marriage.

" What are you doing, Herbert ?" she asked presently.

" Packing my things," he answered. " I shall take my portmanteaus ashore at once, when we get up ; but you, I daresay, won't have your luggage ready to come off for a day or two."

Ethel thought that very unlikely. She had not much to pack, and she was determined not to stay longer on the ship than she could help, or return to it again once she was off. She watched her husband, however, and said nothing. As he finished each portmanteau—and he had three of them in his cabin, besides a larger one below—he put them outside, out of her way, as he said. It was late, and she was tired and sleepy, but still something unusual in his manner kept her awake. There was so much ener-

gy and evidence of pre-arranged purpose in every movement, that she could not help thinking he must have formed some plans for his future life that he had not yet imparted to her, and their reconciliation was too recent for her to dare to question him.

After she had fallen asleep he sat up thinking. Bad thoughts they must have been by the expression of his face, and once or twice he glanced at her, with a kind of sardonic grin on his handsome features. At length he lay down, but his sleep was uneasy and broken. As soon as it was light he rose quietly, dressed without waking his wife, who, tired with the mental agitation of the previous day, slept soundly, and went on deck.

The breakfast-bell rang rather late that morning, yet Ethel was not quite dressed when she heard it. She had caught sight of land out of her port-hole when she awoke, which was not till about eight o'clock, and then she became aware that the ship was stationary; in fact, as she rightly conjectured, they had arrived at their destination—at least, they had gone as far as they should go by the ship. When once she came to that conclusion she began to dress

and pack, doing both alternately, and very glad that her husband's luggage was out of the way, it gave her so much room. When she heard the bell she finished dressing as quickly as she could, and then stood at the door, almost afraid to enter the saloon. Captain Laneton was sure to be there, and she would have to take her place on his left hand, as usual. If only Mounteagle would come and bring her in ! But he did not, so at length she mustered up resolution, and opening the door, entered the room, where every one was already engaged with their breakfast. There were many more people than she had expected to see, though she could not at first see how many. In the first glance she only took in two things—they were, Laneton in his usual place at the head of the table, and her husband's absence.

She went to her place, and then looked round curiously. There were several of the passengers missing besides her husband, and a good many strangers in their places; curious sea-faring-looking men most of them, friends of the Captain's—the Custom-house officer, Harbour-master, &c., she afterwards found. Laneton noticed her anxious, searching glance, and

concluding she was looking for the familiar faces that were gone, he said, in his usual quiet tone,

“A good many of your old friends went ashore along with your husband, Mrs. Mount-eagle, the minute we cast anchor. I think he left some message for you with Mr. Bowen.”

Her husband gone ashore without her, leaving her there on board, after what had passed! She felt a curious contraction of the throat, and put her hand up to it, to try to control the nervous spasm; but she knew that her face turned very white, and that she could not conceal from the keen, dark eyes looking at her.

“I suppose he has gone up to Melbourne, to choose where he will put up whilst we remain there. I hope he will not be long, as I am very anxious to get ashore, after being so long at sea.”

This was all she could force herself to answer, and she tried to speak in an unconcerned tone, though her anxiety was very great, why she did not know. It was quite natural—or, at least, it was natural for him—that her husband should take the first opportunity of getting ashore, and of course he would come back again, if for

nothing else, at least to fetch her and his luggage. Besides, he had declared he would punish the Captain, and in a matter such as that she felt sure he would keep his word. There had been something strange about him last night ; but, after all, he had been kinder to her than he had been for some time, so it was very foolish of her to be uneasy at his having taken advantage of the first chance of a run ashore that came in his way ; only she could not help wishing they would have done eating, and let her get a chance of speaking a word or two to Mr. Bowen quietly. She caught him looking at her once or twice, as though he had something to tell her ; and as soon as the long, tedious meal was over, he came towards her.

“Mr. Mounteagle bade me tell you he’d come back as soon as he had looked about him a bit for a place to stop in,” said Mr. Bowen.

He spoke cheerfully, and evidently had no suspicion anything was wrong; so Ethel thanked him, and turned again into her cabin to finish her packing, feeling more cheerful.

The morning wore on, everybody was leaving the ship, the luggage was brought up out of the hold, and all were busy claiming theirs,

and getting the Custom-house officers to pass it. Mrs. Mounteagle went out to look for hers, determined to have everything ready when her husband should return for her.

“Those are mine,” she said, pointing out her boxes; “but there is another belonging to Mr. Mounteagle.”

“Oh! that’s gone,” said Mr. Webster, who was standing near. “He took all his luggage with him this morning.”

Again she felt that curious spasm in her throat, and this time the shock of what she heard was so great she would have fallen, had she not caught hold of the door near which she was standing. She tried to hide her agitation, but Mr. Webster saw it, and was unable to comprehend what it meant. He mentioned what had happened to Bowen a few minutes afterwards, and said,

“The poor little woman looked terribly scared. I thought she would have fallen when I told her her husband’s luggage was gone; but she got all right in a minute or two, and asked the Custom-house men to look at her things. Now she has got ready to leave, and you can see her standing there on the starboard

side, watching the shore. I suppose she is waiting to see him returning."

And so she was, watching and waiting for nothing else, with a horrible sickening dread springing up in her heart, and overpowering every other feeling. She did not know that the sun was beating down fiercely on her head, with a force that, under any other circumstances, would have made her ill ; she did not notice the beauty of the wide, lake-like expanse, dotted over with vessels of every kind and size ; all the busy life around her was unseen by her aching eyes, though, after so long a residence on board ship, it would naturally have filled her with pleasure had her mind been free and unoccupied.

And the day crept on ; the sails were all unbent, being rolled up and put away, the masts and yards looked bare and gaunt, the mates and men were busy getting everything in readiness for unloading the cargo, which, however, could not be commenced till the morrow ; all her late companions had bid her good-bye, and vanished, and still she remained there waiting and watching. What weary work it was, when every minute fear took firmer possession

of her, hope grew less and less ! She could not weep, her anxiety was too terrible; she could only watch the boats, as they plied backwards and forwards over the glittering water, and she shook her head sadly as passing watermen hailed her, to know whether she wanted one. At length, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Captain Laneton returned from shore. He had not intended to stay on board, was going out to spend the evening with some friends, but, finding she was still there, he asked the steward whether she had dined.

“I wanted her to come down to dinner when the mates were taking theirs,” answered that functionary, “but she wouldn’t. She’s watching for that husband of hers, who has gone off on the spree most like, and forgotten all about her.”

Thinking that very likely, though he said nothing, Laneton went up, and approaching Mrs. Mounteagle, stood for a moment undecided as to how he should arouse her out of her reverie. Whilst he was standing in uncertainty, one of the cabin boys came up, and presented a letter to Ethel, saying it had been brought by a waterman, who wanted to know if his services

would be required, and who, if not, expected to be paid for bringing out the note.

“I’ll call and tell you in a few minutes,” she answered, taking the letter eagerly, but not opening it while the lad remained in sight; she had not noticed the Captain, as he was standing behind her. As soon as she thought herself again alone, she tore open the envelope, and began reading the contents; but she had hardly glanced at them, when the paper dropped from her hands, and she fell forward heavily, striking her forehead against a belaying-pin, which inflicted a severe gash. She would have fallen on the deck had not Laneton, springing forward, caught her in his arms, and seeing that, besides the cut in her forehead, from which the blood was fast pouring, she was also in a dead faint, he caught up the letter, and carried her down to her cabin, where he laid her on the bed, and called the steward to bring water, and see if the doctor had yet left.

“She’s had a fit, or a sunstroke, or something,” he explained, “and has cut herself in falling.” As he spoke, he bathed her face, washing away the blood from the wound with the care and gentleness of a woman.

It was a deep cut, and on the steward's returning to say the doctor had left, Laneton at once saw he must do the best he could with it himself, as the longer it was open, the more difficult it would be to draw together. Like most ship's captains, he was no mean surgeon, and presently had the cut skilfully drawn together and fastened up; but the fainting-fit, which was long and obstinate, puzzled him. At length he bethought him of administering some brandy; while the steward went to fetch it, his eye fell on the letter which had caused all this trouble, and which, crushed, crumpled, and stained with blood, was lying near him.

"There can be no harm in my reading this," he thought; "it may not be right for me to give it to her when she comes to, and I had better see what's in it." Better feelings, however, prevailed; whatever it might be, he knew she would not like him to read it, so he laid it again beside her, and when the brandy arrived, succeeded, with great difficulty, in getting the spoon between her clenched teeth, and pouring some down her throat.

It had an immediate effect; she had eaten nothing since dinner-time the day before, and

weakness, as much as mental distress, was the cause of her illness. With great satisfaction, Laneton watched the result of his doctoring, and, as soon as she showed by her looks that she was perfectly conscious, he and the steward withdrew; he telling her to call him at once if she wanted him.

All idea of going ashore that evening was over for him; he would not leave her in the trouble and distress that had evidently fallen on her, not for anything Melbourne could offer; so he took a paper he had brought on board, and sitting down in his customary seat at the head of the table, pretended to read; in reality he was listening for any sound that might come from Mrs. Mounteagle's cabin. After a while he heard a low continuous sobbing, that sometimes rose almost into a wail of despair, but was then always checked, as though she dreaded being overheard. It was torture to him to listen to this, and be in no way able to help or relieve her. Once or twice he almost rose to go to her cabin, and inquire what he could do for her, but he was afraid he should annoy her by so doing, and with an effort he restrained himself. After a time that appeared to him inter-

minable, she opened her door and came towards him.

“Captain Laneton,” she said, “will you be a true friend to me, for I am all alone, and have none to help me.”

“I will, God helping me!” he answered; “but I fear I am no fit friend for such as you. What has happened?”

“My husband has left me,” she said, trying to speak steadily, though the tears would burst forth afresh at every word. “He tells me he will never see me again, and he says many hard things that are not true; but he doesn’t tell me whither he has gone; he says he has left Melbourne, and that all my efforts to trace him will be unavailing. He counsels my returning to England at once, but I cannot do that, Captain Laneton, while he remains out here. Some day, perhaps, if he is ever in want, I may be able to assist him, if I remain; if I went, I never should. What must I do now? Can I stay on board for a day or two until I find some place to go to, and make some plans?”

“You asked me to be a true friend to you,” Laneton replied, after a long pause; “don’t be

angry or frightened if what I say first seems unfriendly—it is in reality the greatest kindness I can do you. You must leave the ship, and that at once."

"But why?" asked Ethel, helplessly. "I have nowhere to go."

"Bowen and I will go with you, and see that you get proper lodgings. I need not tell you how gladly I would let you remain here, but I should be no friend to you were I to do so. There would be a scandal and gossip of every kind, and it is not only you who would be harmed by it, but the ship about which the gossip was raised would be avoided; the owners would suffer in the end, and I will not be false to you or them. Can you be ready soon? You must have something to eat first, and then Bowen and I will go with you, and help you to settle somewhere. I cannot now think of what your future plans had better be; let me see you to-morrow morning, and then I will talk it over with you."

"I am ready," she said. She would have wished to thank him for his kindness, but the words stuck in her throat, and though she knew he was right, it seemed hard to be sepa-

rated from the only friend she had left. But there was no time for regret or explanations. Laneton with difficulty persuaded her to eat something, but at length, to please him, she contrived to swallow a few mouthfuls; then the waterman's boat was called, and in a few minutes Ethel Mounteagle left the ship that had been her home during the few brief, happy days of her married life, and from which, remembering that time, and the kindness she had experienced on board, she parted with regret, as she thought that the familiar place would know her again no more.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Mounteagle set out from the ship that morning, he had, without committing himself to any precise statement on the matter, left the impression on the minds of all who saw him go that he had started beforehand, at Mrs. Mounteagle's desire, to secure lodgings, or make choice of an hotel, whichever it should be, that, after due inspection, he should deem most desirable to take up his abode in, until he should have matured his plans. He did, indeed, leave a message with Bowen, to the effect that he would soon return for her; but that was only a blind, as he had planned out the course he would pursue the night before. It had flashed through his mind, when it became likely that his young wife would make a scene, and excite general sympathy, if he persisted in declaring his scheme of

abandoning her, that it would be much simpler and easier to disappear, so that she could not trace him, than to be overwhelmed by the tears and petitions that would always attend any mention of his project. Whither, then, should he disappear? This question presented itself to him after he had packed his things, and whilst he sat watching Ethel sleeping, all unconscious of the fate before her. He had not intended going to the diggings—at least not for work. Though they were still in the full tide of success, yet he had heard enough to know that, as a general rule, none but those able and willing to bear hard work made much there. There were fortunate individuals who became rich by one stroke of luck, but these were remarkable exceptions, not the rule, and he had no inclination even to earn a fortune by constant and arduous labour.

His idea had been either to set up as a squatter, or speculate in land; but on talking the matter over with those on board who understood it, he found the time for the latter project had gone by, and thus his field of operations was limited. He had letters of introduction to some of the magnates of the colony, and had

counted a good deal on them, as guarantees that he would somehow be helped on his way; but now it was impossible that he should use them, and the only thing to which he could look forward, as offering him a chance of shaking off the bondage that now weighed so heavily on him, was joining the rush to the gold-fields, and losing his identity in the heterogeneous gathering there assembled.

He did not pause for one minute while forming these plans, to think what he should do when he got there—the object of paramount importance with him at this time was to break for ever the connection between him and the woman he had loved, who now seemed to him like a mill-stone hung about his neck, holding him down from the dazzling future to which he otherwise might aspire. He had brilliant visions of what his keen, unscrupulous mind would accomplish if unfettered by any of the trammels of social life, and he underrated the colonial sharpness, which he was destined to find was quite a match for his Old World intelligence, and was less hampered by conventional prejudices.

He sat long into the night arranging how he should leave the ship without being questioned

or suspected by his wife ; and how, having left it, he should start on his way to the diggings ? He could go by train, of course, and that would probably be the best plan he could adopt, after first buying a miner's kit, and dressing himself in the customary working garb, which would be a sufficient disguise if any inquiries were made after him ; though this he did not in the least anticipate, knowing enough of his wife's character to be sure she would be much more likely to sit down and weep over her hard fate than take any active measures to ascertain his whereabouts. But in all this, where was the vengeance he had sworn against and threatened the man who had dared to address his wife as he believed Laneton had done ; he had been quite determined that man should be punished, but now it did not seem expedient that it should be so—his waiting for that purpose would perhaps prevent his project of escaping alone being carried out, for some time at least ; and he was not disposed to brook any delay in the accomplishment of his wishes. No, it would be wiser for him to give up all idea of revenge or punishment, and to secure his freedom ; if after-years should ever again bring him face to face with

Laneton, then the reckoning should be paid, and the payment would not be one whit less full because it had been delayed so long.

These were the thoughts that occupied Mounteagle's mind as the ship cautiously crept her way up the harbour. He calculated that he would be able to leave by six o'clock in the morning, if the health and custom officers had come on board by that time; and he knew they ought to come as soon as the ship was in, which would be about five o'clock, as they would have to wait for daylight to go all the way up. If he got off when he expected, Ethel would not even discover his absence for several hours, and he would take care she did not get his letter, telling her of the course he had adopted, until late in the day.

Everything happened as he desired—it seemed as if Fortune favoured him in this scheme of deserting his poor young wife, who still slept tranquilly, quite unconscious of what was going forward against her peace and happiness. By seven o'clock he was on shore, when he at once left his luggage at the railway station, thence went to an hotel, breakfasted, and then sallied forth into the town, to procure the necessary clothes that would enable him to present the

appearance of a miner on his way to the diggings. At the hotel he wrote the note which Ethel got later in the day, and before getting his new toggery, he gave it to a waterman, with orders to take it to the *Templeton* late in the afternoon. This the man promised to do, and shortly afterwards Mounteagle, having completed his purchases, found himself, among a number of others, steaming along in the train to Ballarat. There were many in the same car, evidently bound on the same errand as himself, and with them he might have fraternized easily, but his mind was too much taken up with painful reflections, to allow him to make any return to their advances; and they presently, feeling their overtures unwelcome, left him to himself.

He was going over all his life, from the first time he had met Ethel until that day. He remembered his passionate boyish love, and how it had been warped and blighted by her heartless conduct; how for months the sting of that parting had rankled in him, urging him to violent and foolish deeds; and he bethought him how many years the remembrance might have pained him, had he not met her again, and, to his misfortune, found her then inclined to make amends

for the wrong she had formerly done him. If his devotion, then, was not of that pure, self-sacrificing sort it had been—if it was selfish and self-pleasing, at any rate it was powerful, and he had determined to gratify it at all hazards. He had so gratified it, and he had no right to complain or be astonished when it turned to dust and ashes in his possession, like the Dead Sea apples of which he had read; try to stifle his conscience as he might, he had still a feeling that, in the turn affairs had at last taken, he had been to blame. Suppose what was possible was true; suppose that the worst was really the case, and that Ethel had allowed this man to win her heart from her husband, could he hold himself guiltless in the matter? Had he treated her in a way calculated to retain her affections, if he had ever possessed them?—he was obliged to confess he had not.

He would have liked to meet Laneton on equal terms, and kill him, if his power were equal to his will, for having dared to speak of love to his wife, as he supposed the Captain had done; but then he remembered that the man had been tempted with a temptation that he well knew he could not have resisted, and a

feeling of pity took the place of his revengeful sentiments. There was a certain remnant of generosity lingering in his mind, that made him thus excuse the fall of his former associate; besides, he had acknowledged to himself that he had been in fault, and if he had revenged himself on Laneton and killed him, what end would he have gained? For himself, he was done with the woman; she was heartless as she was fair, but if that man cared for her he might have her, for all he would do or say to prevent it. If anything happened to Laneton she would be without a friend in that strange city, where indeed she would need help. But if ever the man should desert her, and should meet him unprotected by her, then the account should be settled; till then they might go their way, and he would go his also, promising himself it would lead far enough away from them.

Thus he thought and pondered as they rushed onward, through an undulating park-like country, to the scenery of which, however, he paid no attention, and was so deeply absorbed as even to take no notice of the conversation going on around him, relative to the gold-fields and their present yield, in comparison with

what had been returned by them formerly.

The day was closing in when they drew near Ballarat; as he noticed the waning light, Mount-eagle could not help returning in thought to the woman he had left, and wondering how she had received the news conveyed in the letter he had sent her. He should have liked to know also what course Laneton had pursued in the affair; whether Ethel had remained on board ship, or whether she had gone on shore; in fact, he found his mind more occupied with her than he would have thought possible, and was not sorry when the necessity for leaving the train interrupted his musings, and he was obliged to look about for lodgings in which to pass the night, and where, if they suited him, he purposed to remain as long as he stayed at the diggings.

After a good deal of hunting and searching through the poorer parts of the town, he found something that seemed to answer—at least for the present; and fetching his luggage, which he had left at the station, he was presently installed in his new quarters. The house in which he had chosen to take up his abode was a small boarding house, in a quiet, retired street, rather removed from the ordinary bustle and turmoil of

the gold-fields, those that formerly were near it having been worked out, and the tide having turned in another direction. It was kept by a respectable Irish family, doing well out in that distant land, as the Irish constantly do abroad, and was very well managed and well ordered, when the fact that it was generally frequented by diggers is considered ; for although, as a general rule, they are an orderly set enough when not belonging to the rowdy class, still their mode of life and their associations engender a roughness that militates against the amenities of social life.

There were about a dozen boarders who lived in the house, and many more who came in for meals. A queer, mixed set they were ; some among them bore the unmistakeable impress of the broken-down swell, had evidently seen better days, and regarded Mounteagle, who had changed his name to Grant, with languid interest, recognising him as one of the order to which they had once belonged, come here to try his fortune like them, and, like them also, very probably destined to failure. There were others, again, strong, sinewy sons of the soil—that is to say, of the home soil of Great Britain, or in some

instances from New Zealand and Tasmania—men who had come over with the first gold rush, and who, never having made their pile, or having dissipated it as soon as made, hung on about the place which had first excited hopes that seemed destined never to be realised. These looked with distrust on the new-comer, despite his miner's garb and strong, stalwart frame. He was none of them, that was evident; in fact, he was so different in manner, look, and expression from even those of his own class that frequented the diggings, that he bade fair to occupy the place of the proverbial individual between two stools.

For Mounteagle possessed a very decided and assertive individuality, which would never for a minute permit him to remain unnoticed anywhere, and which he did not seek to render pleasing by any attempt at conciliating the men now before him. He had never come out with the intention of going to the diggings, and so had never reflected on the necessity of adapting himself to the position and circumstances in which he now found himself; and though he had arrived there, he had by no means shaken into his place, or even begun to realise his position.

He did, it is true, endeavour to enter into conversation with his new companions, while vainly trying to compete with them in the matter of tea-drinking. But, dear as that beverage is to colonial hearts, it did not exercise a sufficiently thawing effect on their inner man ; and Mounteagle mentally decided that he would study which among them were most likely to be most useful to him, and " shout " for them at some neighbouring bar on the first opportunity.

" Drink's the way to manage all these fellows, I know," he thought, watching them as they chatted and laughed and compared experiences over the day's work, until, weary with listening to and taking part in a conversation that all turned on one subject, he excused himself on the plea of fatigue, and went off.

" That chap looks as if he didn't know what brought him here," remarked a big, broad-shouldered fellow, called by his companions Bully Briggs, from his general overbearing, tyrannical demeanour, his reputation as a fire-eater in various ways being so great that no one thought of contradicting him in any way. " He'd better not have come unless he knew

what he wanted ; and I'll have a mind to teach him some day, if he looks at me up and down as he did just now."

"Well done, Bully!—teach him manners!" was echoed from various parts of the room. While some rose and went out for a stroll in the cool night air, some took up papers, or turned to various other avocations, and Bully stretching himself walked to the window, while planning how he would astonish the stranger, and win fresh fame in Ballarat by the achievement.

In the meantime, Ethel had been installed in quiet lodgings in Melbourne. She had two small rooms in a lodging-house kept by a widow in one of the most retired streets. The place was not very clean ; but she could remedy that in her own rooms, and she had not seen anything much better during their search ; what they had seen that were at all suitable, were far above her humble means. But in this secluded spot she might hope to hold on, if not in comfort, at least without fear of starvation, until she could discover some trace of her lost husband. She had a kind of hope, which, though totally without foundation, served to support her and keep her up, that he would return to

look for her some day, and that, finding the *Templeton* had left without her, he would make such inquiries in Melbourne as would lead to his discovering her whereabouts.

How fearfully lonely and unhappy she felt, when her kind friends, having seen her installed in her new quarters, left her! She sat down in utter loneliness on the edge of her bed, and thought that if tears would come they would be a blessed relief. But she was past shedding tears now—her wretchedness was so intense, her alarm and apprehension so engrossing. She could hardly swallow the cup of tea her landlady brought her, and of food she could not taste a mouthful. She had never had much courage in the face of difficulties, and those that now surrounded her were so great as to crush her. She longed for the morrow, for then *Laneton* had promised to call and talk over her plans with her; and she felt as if even the mere sight of his well-known face, the mere sound of his kindly voice, would take away this terrible feeling of isolation that oppressed her, and made her afraid almost to move or to breathe, even in her own quiet rooms. That she should ever muster courage to go out for herself in the busy,

bustling city, she could not believe ; she had all kinds of strange ideas about its lawlessness, and about the freedom of colonial manners, and was quite convinced she should never become accustomed to a kind of life so different from that in which she had been brought up.

She wondered long and anxiously what had become of her husband ; it was natural to think, as he had abandoned her, and doubtless desired not to meet her again, that he had left Melbourne, as indeed he had told her ; but if so, whither had he bent his steps ? She knew very little about the geography of the surrounding country, had at most only heard the names of a few towns, and her chief idea on the subject of the colony was connected with the gold-fields ; what more natural, then, than to think that, having left Melbourne, he had gone to the diggings ? But supposing it was so—and she was not at all certain about it, for she knew her husband had always manifested a disinclination for the pursuit—to which of the numerous fields then yielding their rich treasures was it probable he had turned his steps ?

She ran over in her mind those about which she had heard the passengers talking on their

way out, but found it quite impossible to arrive at any conclusion as to the relative attractions Ballarat, Bendigo, Mount Alexander, The Ovens, M'Ivor, &c., would have for him. She could get Laneton to make inquiries about him through the town, but she had sense enough to see that in such a place, among such an influx of strangers, it would be very difficult, almost impossible, to trace one man, who had moreover obtained so long a start before the search for him could be commenced. It was a hopeless undertaking she felt, but not the less she determined to try it; though over and over again she asked herself to what purpose, when she remembered that, even did she succeed in finding him, his reception of her would be perhaps cruel, certainly harsh, and would probably end in his disappearing from her again, taking care that he should not be discovered the second time, as he had been the first.

It may seem strange that with this knowledge of her husband's character she should have thought at all about endeavouring to trace him, but Ethel Mounteagle until lately had been a spoiled child of fortune, and had but little common sense to guide her, now that she was

thrown on her own resources. It would have been much better for her, under the circumstances, to take ship back to her own home; but this she never even for a moment contemplated doing; and perhaps, as far as her father's reception of her was concerned, she was right. Very little sleep visited her eyes that night; she was disturbed by anxious and busy thoughts; from what she had seen, she feared her small means would hardly be sufficient for her to live on, and even if they were, she knew she must find some occupation if she remained in Melbourne, otherwise anxiety and care would weigh down her mind, and drive her, if not mad, at least into a state very closely approaching madness.

Trouble had already produced such an effect on her that she could think of nothing collectedly and clearly—only in constant work could she hope to find relief from care, and that comparative contentment which was all she could look forward to in the future. Her mind reverted constantly to her husband—wondering where he was, and whether he in any way missed her, who had been his companion so long; and whether he relented when too late the steps he had taken.

On board ship they always breakfast early, whether in port or out of it, so that by half-past eight that meal was over, and Captain Laneton was very impatient for the time to pass, until he might go to her lodgings. He had an idea he should not go too early, but what too early meant was with him a very vague notion ; two hours after breakfast could not be too soon, he thought, for her to be visible, and accordingly a quarter before ten he set out.

“This will never do for the colonies, Captain Laneton,” Mrs. Mounteagle said when he entered ; “I am just going to breakfast, will you join me ?”

He excused himself ; he had already breakfasted, and greatly preferred sitting watching her, though she was not long over the business. She then besought him to try to find out whither Mounteagle had gone.

“I’ll do what I can to help you, Mrs. Mounteagle,” he answered, “but I doubt it will be hard to find his whereabouts. You may be sure he has taken means to hide himself, and in such a swarming city as this, it will be difficult to trace one man. I’ll do my best, though. Is there anything else I can do for you ?”

He rose to go as he spoke. But she would not let him leave.

"I have not half done with you yet," she cried, "I must have work to do; they tell me the diggings have made everything so frightfully dear, my miserable £100 a year will go but a short way. I cannot live here without earning something, and if I don't find him I may have to stay some time. Tell me, what do you advise me to do?"

"How can I advise you?" he answered, looking at her delicate white fingers, that seemed to him so small and fragile; "I don't know what work you ladies do, or whether you ever work at all; you should know all about that better than I."

"Well, I have been thinking a little about it, and I know I'd only have a chance at one thing—that's millinery. Making bonnets and hats, you know," she explained, seeing her companion looked puzzled; "I'm rather good at that, and, from what I have seen from my window, I think the people here want something of the kind," she added, trying to speak cheerfully. "Such a guy as poor Mrs. Beetham (that's the woman of the house) looked when she was going out just now! I know they say they have all the

fashions out here almost as soon as in England, but I don't think they have the taste, and that's what, perhaps, I might find for them. Do you think I could manage it?"

He looked at her with an almost awe-struck expression; to his mind, this girl had always seemed so wonderfully and supernaturally clever; but the genius that could devise such a stroke of policy and ingenuity as setting up a millinery establishment, was, to his way of thinking, even more remarkable than her talent for drawing or singing, or any of the other social arts that had hitherto claimed his admiration. He expressed his approval very warmly, and between them it was arranged that Mrs. Beetham should be propitiated by the present of a bonnet, and induced to exert herself among her neighbours in her lodger's behalf, while Laneton was to secure the patronage of his friends. Once she was fairly started, she was pretty sure she could give enough satisfaction, not only to ensure her customers, but also to increase their number.

When Laneton was gone, she sallied out for a walk to get a glimpse of the town, and try to work off the nervous feeling that oppressed

her at finding herself alone in the bustling streets. She made her way to Collins Street, and satisfied herself, by gazing in at the shop-windows, that the boast about the fashions was not unfounded, being still, however, convinced that, for the most part, her statement about the taste was correct. She was terrified, however, by the busy flow of life; it seemed to her as if she would infallibly be lost; she had never been in a large town alone, and having seen London only at the slack time of year, Melbourne was undoubtedly the most stirring scene she had ever witnessed. Having satisfied her curiosity very easily, she turned homewards; and on arriving there, finding Mrs. Beetham unoccupied, and in a gossiping frame of mind, she opened her project to her, craving her assistance, and offering to construct a new bonnet for her as a proof of her ability.

That decided the matter; Mrs. Beetham readily promised, if the first attempt was a success, she would do her best to extend her lodger's interest. The remainder of the evening was spent in arranging and reviewing a small supply of materials Ethel had brought

from England, in the idea that they might be useful for herself, if they went anywhere remote from a town.

Next day Laneton called again ; he had been to all the stations and hotels, but no man of the appearance he described had been seen anywhere, except at one hotel, from which he had vanished early in the day, and from that time nothing more had been seen of him. The reason of this absence of all trace of him was that Laneton was quite ignorant of his change of garb, and always described him as wearing the costume in which he quitted the ship, which was a well-cut suit of gray tweed, that showed off his beautiful figure to great advantage, and made him a conspicuous object wherever he went, his whole style and appearance being remarkable and unmistakeable.

Ethel's tears fell fast when she heard the news. Unknown to herself, she had been hoping against hope that he had not been far off, and that she should yet be able to recover him. Now that she saw how futile her anticipations had been, she covered her face with her hands, and wept silently; which Laneton seeing, and guess-

ing that, his mission accomplished, his presence was not very welcome, slipped away silently. When she looked up again, she was alone.

CHAPTER XI.

BY the next morning an idea had come into Grant's mind—for by that name Mount-eagle must now be called. He had, on reflection, decided that it would be better for him to be friends with the men who were his associates at the boarding-house; and he knew he could pick up much useful information from them, that would rub off his greenness as a new chum, and influence him in his decision about what pursuit he should adopt as a calling. When he entered the common room for breakfast, he laid himself out to be agreeable, as he well knew how to be, and quickly reversed the opinions of the previous night concerning him. That he was a new chum, was evident; that he knew nothing whatever about gold-mining, and did not seem quite certain by what chance he found himself there, was also very plain; but besides

that, they could see he was a dare-devil, not easily to be daunted by danger, and with a reckless kind of generosity that appealed strongly to all the instincts of a miner's nature.

Even the slight air of superiority that he could not altogether disguise, was forgiven him when he intimated his intention of "shouting" for them at the nearest bar, and asked permission afterwards to accompany them to their shaft.

"I want to see what this work is like," he explained. "I don't think it would suit me, and I don't want to go in for it, but I'd like to see it, and have some notion of how it is conducted."

"Maybe you're scared of soiling your dainty fingers," sneered Bully Briggs, who had been regarding the new chum's rising popularity with growing indignation. "Chaps with hands like yours are not wanted at the diggings; we've a precious sight too many of them already."

His tone was rude and aggressive; it was evident offence was meant, and the rough body of men round the table paused in the all-engrossing business of eating, to watch what the stranger would do. On his conduct now all his after-prestige would very likely depend. To their rude

minds the result of Bully's speech was rather disappointing; the person addressed did not stir, did not move a muscle of his countenance; he merely put down his teacup, which had been halfway to his mouth, and fixing his eyes on the speaker, never moved them, until Briggs became silent and turned away uneasily, as if to avoid the attraction of that gaze. Still Grant's glance never wavered, Bully's eyes seemed irresistibly drawn to his, but the big fellow's courage appeared to have evaporated, and after bearing the infliction for a minute or two longer, he rose abruptly and quitted the room. Then Grant smiled and renewed his conversation with those around him; he felt, however, that they regarded that man with some distrust, who could quell the turbulence of his fellows by the mere power of his glance. To the new chum himself it did not seem in the least strange. He had noticed before that, the nearer man approaches to the brute, the more surely is he unable to meet the calm, steady glance of the educated human being; it is the power by which the sane control the insane, and the more determined the will of the person using the power, the more speedy and effectual its results. Bully Briggs

was but little above the brutes that he resembled in physical power ; and though he quailed beneath the terrible look of the stranger, and attributed the influence it exercised over him to magic, still he swore sundry horrible oaths to himself that he would be revenged, as he took a turn or two up and down outside, whilst waiting for his companions.

The men who had witnessed the Bully's discomfiture felt uncomfortable; they also attributed the wonderful power Grant had exercised, without speaking or moving, over the most turbulent among them, to magic, and they argued that the influence that had produced such a remarkable change in their comrade would be able to affect them equally. It was an unpleasant and disappointing scene for them ; had the two men turned to and fought with their big clasp-knives, or even, in deference to the new chum, used their fists, it would have been another thing, and the victor, whoever it might have been, would have been certain of their approval, more particularly if Bully had been beaten, for although feared he was not popular. But now the case was different; Briggs might justly be considered an object of pity ; he had been subjected to the influence of

the evil eye, and had presented but a sorry spectacle under its power. Was not this man, then, one to be avoided, in spite of his gay, off-hand manner and lively, rattling talk ? No one could tell when he might throw the spell over another, or who that other might be.

So thought all the rough, stalwart fellows at one end of the table, looking at each other anxiously the while, to see what impression the scene had made upon the rest ; while those at the other end, men who once on a time had belonged to Grant's social status, and who were not accessible to the belief in magic, smiled grimly as they saw the effect he had produced, and determined to profit by the influence they foresaw he must shortly acquire.

Noticing the awestruck and uncomfortable manner of the greater part of his new friends, Grant understood what was disturbing their minds, and could hardly refrain from a laugh as he thought how easily he had acquired a reputation.

“ That fellow is a cur,” he remarked aloud, “ he hasn't a heart the size of a pea in his big body ; I wonder men like you have allowed him to bully everyone as he does.”

"It's a bad job to rile him," answered Andrews, a rough but honest-looking fellow at the end of the table; "anyone that quarrels with Bully is pretty sure to come to a bad end; sometimes it's a fall down a pit, sometimes it's a knife stuck in his back in a drunken squabble, but whatever it may be, them as annoys Briggs don't live long, and that's why none of us care to affront him. If you wish to keep your skin whole, stranger, you'd better not go out alone after nightfall."

"A pleasant fellow truly," laughed Grant, "and a blow in the dark is a sure blow, generally speaking; still I'll chance it, and if I catch him at any of those games, I'll have a better reckoning with him than I had just now. It wasn't worth while to do more than give him a warning for that speech; when he knows me better he'll be more careful."

Again the men exchanged glances, and rising went off to their work, taking the new chum with them; indeed now they would have been afraid to refuse him anything. Bully walked behind with some of the number, swearing horribly as he recounted the sensations he experienced when the stranger's cold calm eye fell

on him. Grant, apparently unconscious of his proximity, strode on in front, listening with eager interest to the account given him by his new friends of the marvellous vicissitudes of the gold hunt. The men he was now with formed an association or company for working a shaft which had been carried to a great depth below the surface; several of them had been surface diggers before deep sinking had been thought of, and had made their pile over and over again, but had as regularly wasted it in drinking and riot down at Melbourne, returning to the diggings when they had no longer the means for continuing such a mode of life. When the deep sinking by machinery first became the fashion, one or two of them began to see that, in order to keep pace with their fellows, they must go in for the new improvements also. They organised an association, and succeeded in obtaining for partners one or two men with capital, and since had got on very well in their business. The principal partners in the concern had long ago returned home, having made their pile, and sold their plant to their old associates, who still remained, and seemed likely to remain, as long as drink exercised its fatal fascination over them.

Arrived at the shaft, Andrews, who, in spite of his quiet demeanour, seemed a kind of head man among them, invited Grant to descend with them.

“ You’ll maybe want to join us some day,” he laughed; “ though you say not now, and you’d like to see what kind of a place it is.”

Assenting willingly, Grant took his place in a kind of rude lift with two or three others; Andrews, and one or two more, remaining above, and lowering them down. It gave Grant a curious feeling descending thus into black darkness, and seeing the light of day grow fainter and fainter above them, though, as he neared the bottom, he could see that it was not as dark below as he had thought. There seemed to be lights and people down there. Remarking this to the men with him, one of them answered:

“ Yes; there’s a good few more of us down there—we don’t all go up above at one time. Some of us sleeps and lives here at the pit, while the others is away. We takes it week about.”

They were now at the bottom, and, on the lift touching the ground, they sprang out, it

slowly re-ascending, leaving them standing in a dimly-lighted passage or gallery, that appeared to be exceedingly tortuous, as a few steps before them it turned a corner, and vanished from sight. This gallery was about eight feet high by five or six in width, while far away in front of them the sound of voices and of picks against the clay wall could be distinguished.

“This is where we were seeking the ‘lead,’ ” remarked the miner, with whom Grant was walking; “it puzzled us a long time, and you see we wandered about pretty considerably before we found it. We struck it at last, just there—and a good one it was, with a clear, bright ‘gutter,’ but it didn’t last us long, though we made a tidy lot out of it. Here we lost it again, and had some more zig-zagging work, and just here the Emu Association worked into our shaft, looking for the ‘lead’ also; they turned the other way when they found it wasn’t here, and we blocked up the opening.” As he spoke, the miner raised the lamp he carried, letting the light fall on the wall of clay, where Grant could see a square patch filled up with enormous blocks of stone, in which no trace of the

precious metal could be discovered. "A day or two after we got rid of them," went on his companion, "we struck the 'lead' again, and we haven't lost it since, though it's not as rich as at first. Here we are where they're working—will you take a pick and try a few strokes? You seem a likely fellow for the work, if you don't mind the pain at first."

"It appears easy enough," replied Grant, taking the pick his new friend put into his hand, and setting to work vigorously, of course using five times more exertion than he need have done, or than the skilled diggers ever thought of doing.

"Easy, does it?" remarked his acquaintance Bill, when he saw the energy with which Grant was labouring. "Take it quietly, man. Do you think you or any one else could work all day if you went at it like that?"

"I don't know," replied Grant; "but I do know I'll not work all day. I feel most confoundedly tired already, and I declare my back aches so I can't straighten myself."

As he spoke, he leant against the wall, and watched the busy scene with much interest. A very motley crew were those around him, clad in dirty flannel shirts of every hue

and pattern—or, at least, they would have been of every hue, had not heat and dirt made them all pretty much the same in regard to colour ; moleskin trousers, worn, ragged, greasy, rarely patched, though often wanting that attention, no braces, some fastening their garments together with a stout leather belt ; but these were the dandies, and generally also wore tolerably undilapidated moleskins. Many there were who seemed to consider the fact of their dress staying on or not a matter of little importance, and trusted in Providence to keep everything together. A rough-looking lot, truly, and yet these very men, as Grant afterwards learned, were, as a general rule, smart, and in their own eyes dandified, whenever they appeared on the upper earth—particularly on Sundays, their chief idea connected with which day, it would almost seem, was that they should turn out in all the best toggery they possessed.

Most of these men were working away busily as Grant looked round, digging out huge masses of clay, which were immediately conveyed away by other workers to the puddling machine. Some of them were leaning on their

shovels or picks, resting, and these returned the stranger's curious glance with interest. The clay glittered here and there in the lamp-light, revealing the presence of the precious metal; and amongst the din of the picks, and the crash of the falling earth, he could overhear questions and answers passing relative to his appearance there.

The work was indeed a great deal harder than he had any intention of undertaking, and what he heard of the produce of the gold mines did not tempt him. Ten shillings a day on the average, sometimes more, sometimes less, did not seem to him sufficient remuneration for breaking his back and blistering his hands with such arduous labour; but it was for the present amusing to watch the weird shadows cast by the lamplight, to study the uncouth, almost savage appearance of the men around, to examine the clay when some peculiarly rich spade-ful happened to be turned up.

When Andrews entered presently, he handed over his pick, and sitting down on a mass of stone near, relapsed into a reverie concerning the ways and means of his future life. It was very evident to him, when he came to study the

matter closely, even as it had been evident when at a distance, that gold-digging, its toils and associations, were not suited to his tastes ; and likewise that the prices of things in that part of the world would speedily run through his small income, unless he could find some way of supplementing it by a profession congenial to his habits ; for he was by no means inclined to retrograde in position because he happened to find himself at the antipodes—far from it—he had an idea that he was suited to be a person of importance there, a leading man in fact ; and this, which had been his ambition at home, where he had no power to realize it, he determined to carry out in this country, where he fancied it would not be so difficult a matter.

At intervals he listened to his companions' conversation, but more generally he was absorbed in his own meditations. Presently, however, Andrews, speaking in a louder tone, attracted his attention, though he was not addressing himself to him, but only to the other miners, who had formed a kind of circle round him.

“It is as true as I stand here,” he was saying. “Pat Murtagh is dead, found with his neck

broken at the bottom of his shaft, and they say he has left money beyond counting to his widow. He was a tight man, was Pat, and when he made his money he didn't let it lie idle; he was always turning it over, and if he had given over the digging long ago, he'd still have a tidy sight of gold, I'm thinking."

"And how about the widdy?" asked another man. "Who do you think she'll marry next? Blow'd if I see why I shouldn't go in for her myself!"

The speaker was evidently a dandy among his companions, a tall, good-looking man, and more than one face fell as he announced his intention of going in for this great matrimonial prize. Presently a voice out of the group growled, in a surly tone,

"There ain't much chance for any of us if Jim goes in. Anyhow, it will be one good thing if he's married off out of the way at once. It'll give us poor devils a chance next time."

Jim, who was evidently a lady-killer of repute, smiled complacently, which amused Grant, and a mischievous idea entered his mind, that it would be good fun, as well as a good spec, to go in for this golden widow himself. "Nobody

knows here that I am married, and if I get the money it's always easy to keep out of danger, if there is any. Decidedly this is not the worst chance for getting on, as I want to do. I'll find out how the money is invested before I go too far. We'll have no settlements, of course ; and if it's easy to get at, I can take some away with me, if I find her unbearable to live with. But I don't think there's much fear of that ; if she has plenty of money, it's so easy to get away from her when one wants."

These thoughts were still passing through his mind, when the men around him left off work, and invited him to join them at their dinner. One of the party, who acted as cook, had been preparing this meal whilst they worked, and to their rude kitchen they all proceeded, hungry, no doubt, after the severe labours they had been going through. Beef, damper, and tea, seemed the staple of their life at the mines, luxuries they went in for at the boarding-house above ground, but here their cuisine was of a very primitive character.

The meal passed away quietly till near its close, when Bully, who had been watching Grant for some time with a malignant ex-

pression, took offence at a rather supercilious remark of the new chum's, and without waiting to think of what he was about, threw the contents of a tin pannikin full of tea in Grant's face. The tea was not very hot, but the insult was just as stinging as if it had been. Grant rose to his feet quickly; then restraining himself, he asked, in his slowest, calmest, most deliberate manner, whether that was done on purpose. This, to Bully, looked a little as if the new-comer was cowed, and turning tail. His own spirit therefore began to rise, and he answered, sulkily,

“ You can take it as you please, my fine fellow; but if you take it any way but one, you're a coward. It's not likely I'd throw my tea about in that way by accident.”

“ No, as you say, it would be rather extraordinary,” replied Grant coolly, taking Bully by the neck of his flannel shirt, and lifting him on to his feet with an exhibition of strength that rather disconcerted the big fellow. “ I think I must pay you for your kind expenditure on my behalf!”

The others, looking on, grinned. Now that he appeared ready for a stand-up fight, they

could appreciate the stranger; it was quite another thing from the unnatural and unpleasant incident of the morning, and low murmurs of approval began to be heard. Bully glanced round at his associates with a nasty glare in his eye, that seemed to say he should like to pay them out for daring to sympathise with his opponent. Then seeing that already his prestige seemed on the wane, and that any hesitation would irretrievably destroy it, and reflecting that though his adversary was undoubtedly a tall, powerful man, yet he had neither the great muscular development nor the strength possessed by himself, he put himself into an attitude, at the same time shouting to Grant to come on. And come on Grant did; a boxing match ensued, in which, after a few rounds, the stranger's skill began to show, when Bully, baffled, bruised, bleeding, and almost blown, suddenly drew a sheath-knife he carried in his belt, and made a lunge at Grant, as he advanced to deal a conquering blow.

Grant saw his action, and caught the gleam of the steel as it flashed in the light; quick as thought he seized the hand in which it was grasped, and wrested it from him, get-

ting himself one or two slight cuts in the attempt. When he had succeeded in obtaining possession of the weapon, he stepped back, and resting his back against the wall, held up the knife before his companions.

“Is this fair play?” he cried, in an indignant voice. “Do you call this honest English fighting? An assassin and a coward is no fit associate for brave men! What do you say, comrades?—what shall be done with him?”

“Hold him under the refuse stream of the puddling machine, and then kick him out of the shaft,” cried several voices together. It was a clever stroke, Grant’s appeal to them as brave men; but for that they would have looked leniently enough on such an occurrence, particularly as coming from Bully Briggs, his peculiarly skilful knife-play being the chief cause of his power and reputation. They were none of them sorry to get rid of a man who, by such means, had hitherto ruled the Association with a rod of iron—and indeed a much larger portion of the population of Ballarat than the Dingo company to which he belonged. Now it was agreed he should be paid up whatever claim he had upon them, and they would expel

him, not so much for the sake of the stranger, whose life he had menaced,—that seemed to them a matter of comparatively little importance,—but because they had long wanted a good excuse for getting rid of him, and this offered one. He was forthwith dragged to the puddling-machine, and held under the stream of liquid clay till he was thoroughly soaked, and so besmeared as to be unrecognizable; he was then turned out of the shaft, and finally walked off, shaking his fist at his former associates, and vowing vengeance upon them.

“ You haven’t half seen our mine yet,” said Andrews, after this act of justice had been performed. “ Did you notice, going down, how we had been obliged to cut through three layers of basalt? Terrible hard work it was, and if we had stopped to wash the clay between them, we mightn’t be here yet; but, you see, there’s a good many thinks the deeper you goes the more gold you gets, and most of our fellows thinks so too. Indeed I’m inclined to believe in it myself, but I think they’ll carry it too far some day, and get down beyond the gold; and where there’s none you won’t get none, that’s my opinion.”

"You're right there," laughed Grant. "And, as you say, I see you have had a prodigious amount of labour. How long has it taken you to get as far as this?"

"We were about three years and a half doing it, and it was very lucky for us we stopped when we did," answered Andrews. "Them two fellows who made their pile, and went back to the old country, were pretty near cleared out by getting plant and everything before we reached the gold. I don't think we could have held together three months longer. Will you turn to again, and take another spell at it?"

"Thanks," replied Grant, rather ashamed of idling while the others were all busy, and yet not caring for the toil, nor wishing to mess himself, which would be the infallible result of his joining them in their work. "I don't feel inclined for that kind of employment, it would never do for me; I'll go up above now, and see if there is anything likely to suit me up there."

"Don't let those jobbing fellows get hold of you," called Andrews after him. "They'll fleece you of every penny you've got, tempting you to take shares in this, that, and the other.

If you want to take shares anywhere, do it here, where you know us all, and can come and see fair play when you like. And mind where you're going, for if Bully sees you he'll do you a bad turn if he can."

"No fear," replied Grant, turning to the entrance of the shaft; and in a few minutes more he was standing again in the sunlight, and surveying a scene to which he had paid but little attention before, when his thoughts were occupied by the mine, but on which he now gazed with intense interest. Men of every class and nation were scattered over the plain, in knots and groups, buying and selling as though on an Exchange, prices rising and falling according to the accounts received every few minutes from below.

It was indeed an extraordinary spectacle, there under the blue vault of heaven; even the heat of a blazing sun seemed to have little influence in damping the ardour of these energetic speculators. Grant roamed about among them, loafing, as it was generally called on the diggings, often addressed by an amateur stock-broker, but returning a stolid shake of the head to all the tempting offers held out to him.

He felt that Andrews was right in saying he would be fleeced if he attempted speculation ; he was so perfectly ignorant on every subject relating to gold, and moreover carried "new chum" unmistakably marked on every pose of his figure, every feature of his handsome, and as yet only half-bronzed face. He was meditating as he walked, wondering where Mr. Pat Murtagh had resided, and when it would be the proper thing to go and call upon the widow. He knew they did things quickly in this young country, but, at any rate, he supposed she would hardly receive a stranger before three or four weeks had elapsed. He was also curious to know what kind of person the lady was whom he designed to make Mrs. Grant, though, as he placidly observed, after a little reflection, it didn't much matter—looks were a great nuisance in a woman, and very deceptive ; he had seen enough of that kind of thing, and it was not her appearance, but her money he wanted. He rambled about, looking at everything that was to be seen, greatly astonished at the multitudes of Chinese he met everywhere. They seemed for the most part to frequent those spots that the white men had worked out, or left as

worked out, and they appeared to him an industrious, quiet race. He stopped some time watching one gang of them, and on his return that evening to the boarding-house, expressed at tea—if the nondescript meal they then partook of could be so called—his admiration of their steady, plodding industry.

“Why,” cried Andrews, getting very excited, while all the rest looked up at Grant, as if he had been guilty of some great enormity, “you don’t mean to say you’re speaking up for them filthy, sneaking Chinese? They’re the greatest thieves, liars, and gamblers unhung; there’s no villainy they’re not up to. I’d rather kick those fellows out of the colony than anything you could give me!”

“Well, but what have you to say against them?” asked Grant. “I’ve heard all that said before, but I never heard it proved. Can’t some of you tell me why you hate them so?”

“Ay, can’t we!” answered ten or twelve voices. “If you leave an ounce of clay unpuddled at the top of your shaft, my word, but you’ll have the yellow boys turning it over and picking out the gold before you know where you are. And if a fellow stops away from his claim

awhile, when he returns in a month or so, he's lucky if he doesn't find a score of the dirty devils in it; then there's no end to the dirt they eat. In short, we won't have them—that's to say, if we can get them out, the sneaking thieves!"

Grant laughed to himself, but said no more. Preaching toleration of the yellow men he knew would be a dangerous apostleship, and one which he did not intend to go in for; popularity was his mark, winning the widow and her money, and then spending the money royally.

"Who's the man you were talking about this morning, that you say is just dead?" he asked presently, in a careless manner. "I mean the man whose widow Jim is going in for."

"Ah! that's Murtagh, poor fellow! A close chap he was, and not a good one to liquor; but a warm man because of that; and his widow will be worth looking after," answered Jim. "I'm going to pay my respects to her to-morrow, as soon as the funeral's over."

"She'll not see you, I should think," said Grant, unable to restrain a look of horrified surprise.

"Lord bless you!" laughed Jim, "of course

she will ; and she'll be all dressed out in her best mourning, if she's got it by that time ; if not, perhaps she won't let any one in, as I know she likes to be smart when she sees visitors. But a woman such as her got it by rail straight from Melbourne at once, likely."

" Well, they are a queer set, truly," thought Grant, lingering over his tea, and wondering whether he could ever accustom himself to such a life and such company. It was all so foreign to his earlier associations that he told himself several times he never could become reconciled to this state of things, and for a few minutes entertained thoughts of abandoning his designs on Mrs. Murtagh, leaving the diggings, and in some other colony seeking more congenial employment and surroundings.

Next day spent in the mine, and doing a turn of work now and then, whilst he listened to stirring stories of bush life, which many of the men told well, reconciled him more to his position ; the day after being Sunday, he donned his best toggery, as likewise did his companions ; but unlike them, he determined to employ his time by calling on the widow. Jim had been to see her the day before, after the

funeral, as he had announced his intention of doing, and had been very cordially received. There had been several other visitors there, but he had been evidently the favoured one, and came home quite elated with his success.

“Well, you’ll want to get her,” growled Andrews, “if you’re going to spend your time running about after the women, instead of turning up your clay with the rest. Take my advice, don’t leave her long to think about it, but make sure of her as soon as possible.”

Grant listened to all this quietly, without letting anyone know he was about to make an effort in the same direction. He had some difficulty in getting off alone, but finally a brilliant idea struck him, and he announced his intention of attending church. After that he had no difficulty in going by himself, and having taken the precaution of watching Jim the day before, he was now enabled to pursue his way for some distance, in the right direction. Finally he was obliged to ask a passer-by to direct him to Mrs. Murtagh’s house; and having found it, his courage for a moment almost failed him, as he prepared to knock on the door with his stick, for bell there was none.

His knock was answered by a dirty-looking lad, who grinned from ear to ear when Grant asked if he could see Mrs. Murtagh. The answer was, "You'll find her up there," pointing with his thumb over his shoulder to the stairs, and vanishing into the back premises, whither Grant followed him, hoping to collar him, and make him go up to give his name properly; but the boy had disappeared completely, and after a fruitless search he returned into the entrance passage, and feeling rather awkward, mounted the stairs in search of the widow.

He knocked at the first door he came to, and was told to come in by a deep, hoarse-sounding voice. It was not a very encouraging tone to hear, but having come so far, it was now too late to retreat; therefore, opening the door, he walked boldly in. The room was a large one, but it was so overpoweringly full of furniture that for a few minutes Grant could not ascertain in what part of it the occupant was seated. Presently, however, he distinguished a form dressed in the deepest weeds reclining on a sofa in a dark corner of the apartment. He advanced, and bowing, said, "I hope, madam, my visit will not be con-

sidered an intrusion, because I had not the pleasure of knowing you in an earlier and happier time. I have but just arrived at Ballarat, and having had, some years ago, a friend of the same name as your late lamented husband, I was both grieved and shocked at hearing the sad news of his death the day after my arrival. I have lost no time in coming to offer my sympathy and help to his widow, whom I shall be happy to assist in any way that lies in my power, for the sake of my departed friend."

During this rather long speech, Grant had been feeling his way carefully—testing how her nerves would bear his strong and frequent allusions to the lost Pat; and finding his mention of him well received, he had continued to make use of his name till he had finished what he wanted to say. The widow, in the meantime, discreetly wiped her eyes frequently with a very broad-hemmed handkerchief; but when he paused, she commanded her emotion, and saying in a languid voice, "Excuse my rising, the sufferings of the last few days have so knocked me down as to render me unable to move," she held out her hand to him.

"I felt sure my poor friend's widow would be

glad to see me," said Grant, shaking hands with her warmly. "You will allow me to sit with you, and talk awhile? You require cheering up; and are positively worn to a shadow."

As Grant uttered this audacious speech, he nearly burst into a fit of laughing at seeing how complacently she swallowed the bait. The fact was, she was a prodigious woman, about one of the stoutest he had ever seen, with a fat, vulgar, good-natured countenance, red-faced, with dark eyes and hair. She seemed quite delighted at being told she was a shadow, and sighed.

"Yes," she said, "the doctor told me I must keep up my constitution, or I should never get over this shock. I've had a hard time of it, as you, who knew poor dear Pat, can imagine. Lor! he was that particular with his wittles, that many's the day I've been near rendered down, as they do with the fat cattle, a-cooking for him, and he wouldn't be pleased after. A better man, nor one more particular about how his fresh-water cod was dressed, I never met; and them's the sort it's worth cooking well for, as knows what cooking is. Lor! sir, you wouldn't believe the ignorance of them low

fellows here—the way they misuses the gifts of nature is a perfect dispensation of Providence. Not but what the mutton here is the worst I ever tasted—stringy and tough, without an atom of fat; and the beef is no better. When I think of the nice, tender, juicy beef-steaks, well smothered in onions, I used to eat at home, I longs to be back in the old country again. Not but what it has its drawbacks. Still there's them as knows what cooking is there, and likes to get their victuals well dressed."

"A gastronome, evidently," thought Grant, as she paused for want of breath—"that isn't a bad quality in a wife, as it ensures your getting good dinners. I'll humour it. I agree with you," he added aloud, "there's no place like the old country for good cookery, unless when one happens to light on a talented lady like yourself, for I know by the way you talk that you understand what you are talking about. Poor Pat was indeed a most estimable man in that way. I remember his often saying to me, 'Grant, my dear boy, never marry a woman who doesn't understand cookery thoroughly, and can cook herself, on occasion.' He used to add too in fun sometimes, 'that any woman

he thought of marrying, he would first ask to cook him a dinner, and then watch her do it—the result should determine his choice."

"Oh! it wasn't in fun, it was real earnest," said the fat lady, raising herself with sudden energy; "he'd been courting me a good while—maybe a year off and on—when one day he comes in, looking very nervous like. 'I want you to do me a favour, dear,' says he—(he always called me 'dear' then). 'What is it?' 'My cook has gone out for the day,' he answered, 'and she's left nothing ready for my dinner. Would it be too much trouble if I asked you to do it for me?' 'No trouble, but a pleasure,' says I. 'Come and dine with mother and me; we've got a nice tender steak, and I'll give you plenty of onions with it. I'm going down to do it now.' 'Let me go with you?' says he. I said 'Yes;' and we went down. I did it on the gridiron, not in the pan, as some lazy folks do, just to save themselves trouble; but the gridiron is the real, right way, isn't it?"

"Certainly," assented Grant, seeing she wanted an answer, but not knowing exactly in what the difference between a gridiron and a pan consisted.

"I knew you'd say so," answered the lady. "I can see you're one of the right sort, and likes your wittles dressed proper. Well, I was a-tellin' you how he watched me, and how I turned my steak, and biled my potatoes, and did everything all right, till just as I was after popping the steak into a piping hot dish, garnishing it with fried onions, and was in the act of pouring the gravy over it, his feelin's overcame him—he plumped down on his knees on the kitchen flags, which they were so clean you might have eaten your dinner off them, and taking my hand (the one I wasn't using to pour the gravy with), he said, 'Dearest Amelia Jane, the smell of that steak has gone to my heart—you're the best cook ever I seen, and I love you for it. Will you be my wife, and cook my wittles always, instead of only once in a way?' I liked the way he said it—straight out, and no nonsense; besides, I thought I had some chance of being happy with a man who knew the differ between bad and good cooking, so I said, 'Done!' at once; and we were married three weeks after—me dressed in a real silk gown, the first one I ever had at that time, though I've had them often enough since, for, as

long as I pleased him with his wittles, Pat was never stingy, and many a good present I got for bringing a new dish to table."

During this confession, Grant with difficulty kept his countenance ; the bow drawn at a venture had surely shot home to the mark in this instance, and that, coupled with Mrs. Murtagh's complacent manner of relating how she won her dead husband, was almost more than he could listen to with the proper expression of sympathy and appreciation.

As she paused at length, and expected a remark in answer to her tale, he said,

" No doubt he was a very worthy man ; and the little incident you have just told me proves that he knew how to appreciate worth when he saw it. But a man would have to be a bad fellow indeed if he did not get on well in the world with such a partner as my poor departed friend possessed."

She simpered, passed her handkerchief lightly over her eyes, and answered,

" Lor ! sir, though I say it that shouldn't, I was a help to him ; for he had his faults, like others, and led me a bad life sometimes. If anything happened to put him out, there was

no pleasing him, and he did swear frightful ! There's them as says, 'Hard words break no bones,' but indeed I'd as lief have my neck broken at once, and have done with it, as hear all the outrageousest words as ever were thought of pelted at me day and night, sometimes for a week together, till he'd sworn hisself so hoarse he could swear no longer. But there's worse husbands in the world than he was, as mayhap there may be better. I've heerd tell of them, though I doubt that sort don't grow on the diggings."

She shook her head and sighed as she arrived at this conclusion, and Grant ventured to say a few words in praise of her admirable conduct under such trials. He assured her he had heard her mentioned with intense admiration everywhere (this was true, for her money), and that he esteemed himself happy to have made her acquaintance. He then rose to take leave. She pressed him to stay a little longer, but Grant, who felt at times some difficulty in controlling his risible muscles, and acting his part properly, excused himself, promising compliance with her earnest réquest to come, and see her as often as he could whilst he remained on the

diggings; for he had impressed her with the idea that his stay was likely to prove but a very temporary one, and that she might expect any day to hear of his departure.

When he got into the street, he indulged in a long, quiet laugh, but felt at the same time more than ever determined to carry out his plan; and, in spite of Dandy Jim, he apprehended little difficulty in succeeding. She was nothing but a jolly, vulgar, good-natured cook; but then old Pat Murtagh had left her £40,000, a sum which, to him, would have richly gilt a much more bitter pill than there was any prospect of this proving. She would be very easy to manage, as long as she was well supplied with pots and pans, and plenty of food to put into them, more particularly if he appeared pleased with her efforts; and from her conversation he judged he should have no cause for dissatisfaction in that respect. Altogether he began to fancy he had lighted upon his legs; and lying down under the shade of the gnarled blackened stump of a dead gum-tree, that seemed to have been on fire over and over again, and that had always escaped being consumed, he began to build castles in the air, as

to where he should go, and what he should do when master of the £40,000.

In the meantime, the widow Murtagh was absorbed in blissful day-dreams, pleasantly divided between visions of a new method of cooking kangaroo venison, and reminiscences of the handsome stranger who looked so distinguished in his new mining dress, and who appeared to her immeasurably superior to his old friend, her late husband. She hoped he would come soon to see her again, and then she could ask him to dinner, and treat him to the new dish of which she was dreaming, and which she was surprised to find did not interest her nearly so much as such a subject was wont to do.

CHAPTER XII.

IT was not Grant's intention to let Mrs. Murtagh make too sure of her conquest; besides, he found this kind of courtship very stupid work, and but for the money-bags in view, would never have had courage enough to continue it. He did not call next day, therefore, though the widow had arrayed herself in her best, in expectation of his arrival, and though she was very sharp and snappish to Jim and some others who came to try and work themselves into her good graces. She was afraid these people might be there when he came, and that she would thus be deprived of the quiet talk with him she had enjoyed so much yesterday. This put her out, and the several suitors went away considerably crest-fallen, anathematizing the fickleness of women, and wondering what could have ruffled the honey-sweet temper of the day before. Not

one of the whole set knew of the formidable rival that had entered the field against them, and several humble aspirants took courage from remarking that Jim, the lady-killer *par excellence* of Ballarat, was quite as badly treated as any of the others. He saw it too, and the sensation of any woman slighting him appeared to be unpleasant to him; when he came that night to the table, he remarked that the widow Murtagh was a cross-grained cat, and it would take more money than she had got to make it worth any man's while to have her.

Grant smiled grimly when he heard this, guessing that he had something to do with her sudden change of temper; and one of the other men, looking up, said,

“If you're going to give in, Jim, tell us; other fellows will have a chance then, and I don't mind if she had the devil's own temper, if I got that £40,000.”

“Oh! I'll go on for the fun of the thing, and to give her a lesson,” answered Jim. “See if I don't pay her out, that's all. I daresay I'll be able to work the money out of her without marrying her at all, and that would suit me a good sight better.”

“ You’d better mind what you’re about, then,” said Andrews ; “ for though an old cat like that will often give a young fellow money, yet she always keeps a pretty sharp look-out on him, by way of seeing how he spends it, I suppose, and you’ll likely get into trouble if anyone peaches about your little games to her.”

Jim smiled with a sense of his power over the female heart as he replied—

“ Yes, no doubt she’d cut up pretty rough, if any fellow played me a dirty trick like that ; but, bless you ! I’d get round her, or a dozen like her, in no time, and then I’d square accounts with the chum who’d tried to make mischief.”

The conversation dropped, but it showed Grant he must not lose time in prosecuting the advance he had already made, as there were plenty ready and willing to make up to the widow for any inattention on his part.

Next day he half made up his mind to go, but put it off till too late—poor Mrs. Murtagh, meanwhile, spending her day waiting for him, and hardly caring for a dainty little dinner of Wonga-Wonga pigeons, with bread sauce, so anxiously was she watching for his arrival.

The meal exercised a soothing influence on her, notwithstanding, and after it had been washed down by a few glasses of wine of the best home growth, she began to tell herself that Mr. Grant, though very charming, and so fully capable of appreciating good cookery, as his conversation had proved him to be, was not to be depended on, and she had better devote her attention to some of the other young men who daily flocked around her. "Perhaps he has left the diggings," she mused; "he said his stay was but for a short time, and no doubt, if that is the case, he's sorry enough he never had a chance of eating a meal cooked in my house."

She comforted herself thus, and was quite affable to Jim and Co., when they again made their appearance. It was evident that, in the opinion of these gentlemen, a good start was everything, and several among them had made up their minds to try their luck at the first opportunity. A two or three days courtship was all that love or manners required on the diggings. She could not misunderstand the drift of their attentions, and the sooner they came to the point the better, the first in the field in such a case being often the lucky man. This

day, therefore, there was a marked determination on the part of more than one rough-looking fellow to sit the others out, in order that he might enjoy a *tête-à-tête* with the lady, and give utterance to his feelings and aspirations. An equally marked resolution that they should all leave together pervaded the others. At length the sitters-out gave in, and they all left in a body, Jim determining not to be so done next time, but to go early the next day, that he might make sure of a private interview.

When, therefore, he made his appearance at Mrs. Murtagh's, and, conformably with custom, made his own way upstairs, his astonishment and indignation may be imagined at finding his friend, the new chum, Grant, there before him, sitting tolerably near the smiling widow, and evidently making himself very agreeable. As Jim afterwards expressed himself to his companions, he was took quite aback, and did not know whether to retire, or to put a bold face on it and remain. It had never occurred to anybody to suspect that Grant could be after the same game as themselves. They had thought him too much of a swell to condescend to a low marriage for the sake of money, quite forgetting

that that meanness is of all ranks and grades in society, and of all ages also.

Grant did not seem in the least put out at being discovered; he knew that it must come to that sooner or later, and he was just as well satisfied it should be soon as late, as he felt pretty sure of his ground, and did not want to disappoint the fellows about, or incur more of their ill-will than necessary. He was cordial and friendly, therefore, with Jim, thereby setting Mrs. Murtagh at her ease, and enabling her to make herself agreeable to both her visitors. At first she had felt decidedly frightened and flurried at Jim's arrival, fearing, in her innocence, poor woman, that Grant would thereby be driven away. Finding they were friends, however, her fears abated, though she could not help wondering how it was that all Grant's acquaintances seemed of such a different stamp from himself.

It was plain Jim could have no chance that morning of saying what he wanted, so, after a very brief visit, he hurried off, on the excuse of having work to do, but, as Grant shrewdly guessed, in reality to proclaim to his comrades

that the new chum was going in strong for the widow.

“And looks likely to win,” he added, disconsolately. “None of us has a chance against the like of him, and I will say I think he had no right to enter for mining stakes, which these was surely. Him that never did a day’s work at mining in his life, going in for all that pot full of money, raised every penny of it off the diggings. It’s an infernal shame, and he’s a cussed mean sneak for all his fine airs.”

“Well, it is hard lines no doubt,” sympathised his listeners; “but no harder than when you were cutting out all of us. Whichever of you wins, it don’t make much odds to the rest of us —we never had a chance.”

In the meantime, once Jim was out of the way, Grant put his shoulder to the wheel. He saw that, if he gave the widow a little encouragement, she would be very willing to do a good portion of the courting herself; and thus spare him a task which even the golden harvest he expected to reap could hardly stir him up to accomplish, without a good deal of assistance from the lady.

“I have been expecting you these two days,”

she said, with a sigh that seemed to come from the very depths of her portly chest. "Where have you been?"

"I have been working, and fearfully busy," he answered. "A poor devil like me has no time for pleasure, even though it be so great as that which awaits me here. I must work or starve."

That was not strictly true, but Grant counted on gaining her pity thereby, and to him any means resulting in the required end seemed justifiable.

"Ah! that's what you men always say when you don't want to be with us—you tell us you're busy, and deceive us into feeling sorry for you," she replied, having, without knowing it, gone so very near the truth that Grant winced, almost fearing detection, but quickly recovered himself.

"How cruel of you to say so!" he murmured; "away from you I am miserable, and yet I dare not tell you so, for fear you should not believe me. There is such a terrible barrier between you and me, that I dare not speak my thoughts. A poor miner, earning his bread by the labour of his hands, is no fit companion for a woman

like you, who, besides her own attractions, possesses wealth sufficient to tempt the cupidity of the adventurers that always swarm at a place like this. I should only be numbered among them if I dared give expression to my feelings, and therefore the best thing I can do is to keep away from you for the future, no matter what it costs me. I little thought when I came the other day to see the widow of my old friend, and offer my poor services, that I should so soon have cause to rue the day when I first beheld her."

"But how?—why?" asked the good woman, fairly bewildered by Grant's pathetic, mournful air, and his flow of words. She gathered that there was something wrong, that he talked of there being a barrier between them, and of never seeing her again, but why or wherefore she could hardly comprehend.

"Because your money makes a great gulf between us," he answered, slowly taking her hand, and fixing his bold, handsome eyes on hers, as he tried to speak with proper pathos and feeling; "because people will say I am only seeking you for your fortune; and even though it should break my heart to leave you,

my pride will not allow me to bear such an imputation, therefore it is best that we should part, and that I should return no more. It will not trouble you much; and what I suffer is a matter of little consequence."

"But what if the parting should break my heart too?" she asked softly. Her attitude was affected, and ill suited to her portly presence, but her voice betrayed something of real feeling, that would have softened a less unscrupulous man than Grant. It only amused him, and made him determine on cutting short the scene, until he should have had his laugh out, and got his sense of the ludicrous again under control, when it would be easy to resume the matter where he had laid it down. He answered therefore,

"There is little fear of that—you have known me too short a time; and such good fortune is not for me. Farewell!—think sometimes of the poor miner, who would have loved you so well, had circumstances favoured him."

He felt that with such a parting, artistic finish demanded that he should have embraced her, but that he could not bring himself to do; even the artist's pride in turning out his work

complete and perfect could not sustain him through such an ordeal ; but he squeezed her hand energetically, and darted from the room, banging the door after him, as if overcome by the violence of his emotions.

“ Poor fellow ! ” sighed Mrs. Murtagh, falling back in a chair, when she found herself alone, and shedding a few tears into her elaborate broad-hemmed handkerchief, “ so he cares for me, and he thinks my money will prevent my taking him. I don’t see why I shouldn’t have what I like, and what I want, because I am rich—on the contrary, if I choose to have him I will, in spite of the bad tongues of the gossips about here, and so I’ll tell him. We could marry, and go somewhere else, and not a soul need ever know which of us was the one who owned the cash. If he doesn’t come again—and I’m afraid he means not to do so—I’ll send Harry after him, and bring him back here ; then it will be easy to settle the business, for I don’t believe any man in his senses would run away from a woman he liked in that way, just because she had a little gold.”

Comforting herself thus, she called the lad before mentioned as Harry, desired him to go

and hang about the Dingo Mine till he saw some one he could ask where the miner named Grant lived, and then come back and tell her.

“Mind you don’t ask Jim Lancy where he lives,” she added, “as he’d tell you wrong; and if you do all this right, I’ll give you five shillings when you come back.”

The boy was only twelve years of age, but, like most juvenile corn-stalks, he was smart and precocious beyond his years. He winked in a friendly manner at his mistress, and departed to do her bidding, murmuring meanwhile,

“She might have been more freer with her shiners, when she’s sending me to find where her lover hangs out. Blowed if I think I’ll do it for less than one yellow boy at least! When I come back, I’ll tell her nothing till she gives me that; and she’ll be so precious glad to get what I know out of me, there won’t be much difficulty about getting what I ask, I guess.”

Grant, thinking he had made enough progress for one turn, did not come back next day, and the time was spent in a lively manner by Mrs. Murtagh, being divided with great impartiality between refusing offers, and bewailing

herself as the most wretched of women. Even the suitors whom she consigned to despair, did not succeed in exciting much pity in her pre-occupied breast; and besides, she fancied the sting to them lay not so much in her being blind to their merits, as in the unattainability of her £40,000. There was only one man whom she credited with being perfectly disinterested, and he, alas! was gone from her—driven away by fear of evil tongues, and too stern a sense of honour. The poor woman pictured him to herself fifty times that day, her imagination always presenting him to her either as she had last seen him, with mournful eyes fastened on her face, and the words of an eternal parting on his lips; or else—and this was the more sorrowful image of the two—she imagined him labouring deep down underground, with bent frame and aching limbs, in rough, uncongenial companionship, toiling with a heavy heart for that metal that had placed so great a distance between them, and by the finding of which himself, he could alone hope to become on an equality with her. She was over forty, if she was a day, was stout, vulgar, and red-faced, but she was as truly in love with

this mysterious miner, who looked like a king among his fellows, as the veriest miss in her teens could have been. She was completely under the influence of that all-pervading sentiment, which, like the sun, dawns on the evil and the good, and shines on all the world alike.

How different the picture of her imagination was from the real state of affairs, we can imagine; but, unfortunately for herself, she was quite in the dark as to the manner in which he spent his time when away from her. Even had she been aware that he beguiled the hours pleasantly enough, sauntering through the piles of buildings that were springing up everywhere, discoursing with an artizan here, with a miner there, it would not have altered her ideas as to his feelings for her. Thus the day rolled slowly by, and many passionate, regretful tears were shed after her head touched the pillow that night. She was not a woman to shed idle, useless tears, however; with her they produced results, and the results of these were visible next morning, when before going to breakfast, she sat down to write a letter.

Now letter-writing was an affair of time and

labour with her—an enterprise not to be lightly undertaken; it was evident, then, it must be some serious resolution that sent her so early to her desk. Everything was prepared with a deliberate, quiet mien that told she was acting on a plan arranged beforehand; but when she sat down, opened her desk, and took out her paper, she suddenly discovered there was neither pen nor ink in the house. Here was a vexatious delay, and one that furnished its own commentary on the habits of the establishment. "And yet," mused the widow, "I was certain there was ink in that bottle the last time I had it in my hand. Perhaps Harry drank it—I'll ask him."

Harry was called and asked accordingly, "No, mum, I didn't drink it," he answered promptly—"tain't good enough; but I'll tell you what's come to it. You remember the day just before master died, that you axed me to clean your boots? There weren't no blacking in the house, so I mixed the ink with some lamp ile, and did 'em with that—jolly fine blacking it makes, too, for soft leather; but it won't put a shine on, if you want that."

"I do believe boys are the very mischief!"

sighed Mrs. Murtagh, despairingly. "Run straight down to the store there at the corner, and fetch me up a bottle of ink and a couple of pens. Be smart now, for you won't get your breakfast till you come in."

Thus menaced, Master Harry caught the silver thrown at him, and vanished at top speed, the good woman sitting down heavily, and muttering—"Was ever woman tormented as I am? I make up my mind to do a thing of this kind, that I'd much rather not have to do, and then, of course, that wretched boy must go and make away with the ink, keeping me here, thinking of what I have to say for ever so long, when I might have done it and sent it by now."

The ink came back in due time; and Harry got his breakfast, and sixpence besides, for the expedition he had displayed on his errand; a present which represented much the same amount of enjoyment and expenditure to him that a penny would to a child at home. Mrs. Murtagh found by this time she could not undertake the labours of composition without first taking some refreshment, so she had her breakfast also; after which she placed herself at her desk, and with elbows well squared, and head

bent down until it almost touched the paper, she penned the following missive:—

“MY DEAR MR. GRANT,

“Since you left me yesterday in so promiscus a manner I have been thinking over wot you was saying to me, and I can’t see as how that should make any difference between friends, for there’s them as is born with it and there’s them as marries it, which I did it myself and it ain’t a bad way I can tell you, and there’s them as makes it which is wot you’re trying to do, and which is wot you won’t never succeed in doing, as I know by your cut the minute as ever I set eyes on you. There’s them again as steals it but we won’t speak of them, for fear of giving offence not but what I knows many a one up in the world now as made his money that way. But wot I’m writing this is for to say do you come over here this evening to see me and don’t let it come between true friends that values each other and will do so ever more if you’ll forget this foolish notion you’ve taken up and return to your devoted wellwisher,

“AMELIA JANE MURTAGH.”

There were few stops and few capitals in this production, and the caligraphy was of rather a scratchy, straggling order, besides a few examples of phonetic spelling. Notwithstanding these slight drawbacks, it was a very welcome letter to Grant, when he found it sticking in the frame of the mirror, in the common room at Mrs. Jones's boarding-house, where Harry had left it, according to Mrs. Murtagh's instructions. It was late when he received it, and there was such a full promise of a satisfactory arrangement of all his difficulties, that he determined, as he was tired, to act as though everything was settled, and leave his visit till to-morrow. He knew well she would not have time to change her mind, or be piqued into any course dangerous to his success, and once he appeared next day it would be easy to him to smoothe away all doubts excited by his tardy answer to her appeal. He laughed contemptuously as he perused the note, and then, tearing it into infinitesimal fragments, threw it out of the window, scattering thus to the winds of heaven the words traced by loving if uneducated hands, and that had cost patient toil and tender thought to the woman whom he designed to deceive and betray.

How often are the loving words penned by trembling hands, the outpourings of affectionate, tender hearts, thrown aside with a scoff or jest, or cast out in fragments, the sport of every wintry blast, by those that should value and cherish them as the expression of a feeling they have used every art to win, and which therefore they are bound by every law of honour to prize and revere. There are few sadder things in the world than the love of a faithful heart wasted on an unworthy object, and yet, for some mysterious purpose of providence, it is a fate awarded frequently to the best and truest. Perchance it is the trial of their patience, the cross assigned for them to wear; not the less is it a wonder and a puzzle, to those who see the false and worthless the objects of the purest love, the most unbounded devotion, while those on whom it might well be bestowed wander through life unloved, perhaps friendless.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







